

BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1996

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BANDWAGON

The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

Vol. 40, No. 6

November-December 1996

FRED D. PFENING, JR., EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor Joseph T. Bradbury, Associate Editor

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CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY-Fred Dahlinger, Jr., President, 451 Roblee Rd., Baraboo, WI 53913; Richard J. Reynolds III, Vice President, 1186 Warrenhall La. NE, Atlanta, GA 30319; Dave Price, Secretary-Treasurer, 4102 Idaho Ave., Nashville, TN 37209.

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

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The color print is in the circus collection of the Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida.

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THE 1997 CHS CONVENTION

President Fred Dahlinger has an-

nounced that the 1997 Circus Historical Society convention will be held in Chicago, Illinois during the June 6-15 engagement of the Big Apple Circus.

An exciting program of historical presentations, visitations and experiences incorporating special Windy City attractions is being planned.

Further information will appear in an upcoming issue of *Bandwagon*.

REVIEW OF THE 1996 SEASON

The review of the 1996 circus season will appear in the March-April *Bandwagon*. All readers and circus owners are invited to provide information, photos, newspaper ads, etc. for the review. Especially needed is information on small, short lived and independent circuses.

Please send your contribution to Fred D. Pfening III, 1075 West Fifth Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43212.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND CIRCULATION as required by 39 U. S. C. 3685.

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I certify the statements made by me above are correct and complete.(signed) Fred D. Pfening, Jr, publisher. (10-1-96)

John & Brigitte Pugh, along with the entire
Staff and Cast
of the **GLYDE BEATTY-**
COLE BROS.
CIRCUS



Wish You
a MERRY
Christmas
AND
Happy NEW YEAR

The following is the invitational paper delivered on the evening of the members' banquet at the 1996 CHS convention in Baraboo, Wisconsin. It was not planned as a scholarly, documented article, but rather as an informal, possibly even entertaining, talk on the subject, and is here published in the same form as it was presented. Copyright © 1996 by A. H. Saxon. All rights reserved.

JAMES ANTHONY BAILEY—or shall we call him "McGinnis"? perhaps even "Gordon"?—is certainly one of the more enigmatic figures in the history of the circus. Despite the fact that every book on the subject makes reference to him, and that, rightly or wrongly, many people consider him to have been the greatest circus manager who ever lived, surprisingly little is known about his personal life. I am by no means convinced all that much is truly known even about his more public career as a manager, there have been so many exaggerated, unsubstantiated claims made in regard to that particular topic; but *pace!* I am not here to argue with or attempt to disabuse Bailey fans of any misconceptions they may have on that score, but merely to throw some light on the man himself.

Most people are familiar with at least one well-worn tale relating to Bailey's legendary shyness, his supposed distaste for the flamboyant kind of personal publicity his partner P. T. Barnum gloried in, his secretiveness about his origins that at times amounted almost to paranoia. Even in his own day he was deemed to be a mystery not only by his contemporaries but also, at various times, by members of his own immediate family. With the result that—unlike his extroverted partner Barnum, about whom some people might argue we have heard *more* than enough—there has never been a book-length, let alone a scholarly, exploration of his life. Instead, what we have is largely a collection of unrelated anecdotes drawn from the memoirs of old circus troupers and others who claim to have known or worked for Bailey. The one study to date that attempts to present a more or less comprehensive history of Bailey's professional career is a privately published pamphlet by the late circus historian Richard E. Conover, *The Affairs of James A. Bailey: New Revelations on the Career of the*

NEW LIGHT ON THE LIFE OF JAMES A. BAILEY

BY A. H. SAXON

World's Most Successful Showman. That study—and it's a good one, in my opinion—is now nearly forty years old, runs to only seventeen pages, and deals almost exclusively with Bailey's life in management.

Conover did, however, base his work on the great collection of circus and wild west materials in the Princeton University library known as the "McCaddon Collection." He also claimed to have been the first to mine this collection, which came to the university following the death of its owner, Joseph Terry McCaddon, in 1938. McCaddon, who was the young brother of Bailey's wife Ruth, worked for his famous brother-in-law in a number of responsible positions, and at times owned and managed several entertainments of his own, including dime museums, touring theatrical companies, and a circus named after himself that he took to

Carte de Viste photo of Bailey in 1876. The original is in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.



France early in this century. His older son was a Princeton graduate, which explains how his collection ended up at that institution—and since McCaddon eventually came into possession of all Bailey's personal papers, and seems to have been pretty much a pack rat on his own, this is a very sizable and valuable collection indeed. One thing Conover did not find at

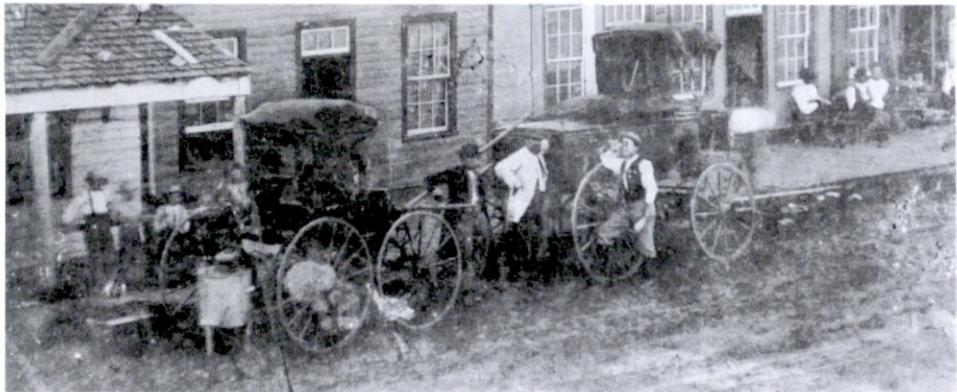
Princeton, but which he mentions at the very end of his pamphlet, was a "biography" of Bailey that McCaddon was rumored to have been working on at the time of his death. "He should have finished it," Conover modestly writes, "as it would have been much better than this one."

* * *

Cut to July 1979 and New York's Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where the famous autograph dealer Charles Hamilton was conducting an auction. Some of you, I daresay, were present at that event, which included no less than 50 separate lots—often quite extensive in themselves—consisting of letters, photographs, and other materials relating to Bailey, Barnum, Buffalo Bill, and to the American circus and wild west show in general. I look at the catalogue for that auction today—with its descriptions of the items to be sold and my supplementary notes on them and the prices they realized—and am almost driven to despair! Since I was then at work on my edition of Barnum's letters, I spent the better part

of a day examining all these wonderful treasures in advance, and later assisted the Bridgeport Public Library in bidding in a number of lots possessing peculiar relevance to Barnum. We had the tremendous sum of a little over \$2,000 to spend—and with that were able to get nearly everything we wanted! At least one other institution that felt compelled to join in the bidding wasn't nearly so happy, however. All of these materials obviously came from the same source as had the McCaddon Collection at Princeton, and as one of the university's disappointed librarians remarked to me, "We thought we had been given *all* of it."

They hadn't, of course—and, recalling Conover's remark at the end of his pamphlet, this set me to thinking. Although Hamilton understandably wished to keep his source confidential, he did acknowledge to me that the seller was a McCaddon descendant.



When I asked him if this descendant possessed any other items, like McCaddon's rumored "biography" of Bailey, he insisted there was nothing more to be had: he had "got it all." I urged him to keep the matter in mind anyway and to give the Bridgeport Public Library first crack at any additional materials that might be discovered. Lo and behold! in early 1986 additional materials did turn up in the basement of the descendant's house, and, true to his word, Hamilton did offer them directly to the Bridgeport Public Library. And among those materials, running to some 600 pages and preserved in three loose-leaf binders, was McCaddon's long-lost manuscript "biography" of Bailey.

Although you would never know it from my delivery, I have been putting this word "biography"—Conover's own term for it—in quotation marks, since I think it would be more accurate to describe the work as a "memoir." The focus of the narrative is indeed on Bailey, and the period covered roughly coincides with Bailey's dates (which McCaddon always gives as 1847 to 1906, incidentally, the same as are also incised on Bailey's sepulchre). But the viewpoint is pretty much McCaddon's, and the work is primarily an account of his direct, personal knowledge of Bailey and his shows. The manuscript, therefore, is by no means a comprehensive or complete treatment of Bailey's life. Also worth pointing out is the fact that McCaddon, who had a number of scores to settle and who was quite defensive about his brother-in-law, whom he literally worshipped and at one point terms "the most wonderful man in the world," cannot always be relied on for accuracy and especially an impeccably objective interpretation of events. Then, too, the manuscript itself, which can hardly be termed an example of literary excellence, is in an unfinished, at times disorganized state. The result of all this is that anyone making use of McCaddon's memoir, in addition to exercising considerable caution and—one would hope

Bailey next to the wheel of Lake's advertising wagon. A note on the photo indicates this was Bailey's last day as a bill-poster for Lake in 1869. The original is in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

bringing expert judgment to bear, must be prepared to supplement and at times correct it with information drawn from a broad array of other sources.

* * *

So much for methodology and the history of the manuscript. Now let me tell you something about Bailey's background and personal life—information that, in many instances, McCaddon claims to have gotten directly from Bailey and that could not very well have come from any other source. His real family name, as most historians are aware by now, was McGinnis—a name so repugnant to him that from early youth on he never used it. Instead, when he was first starting out on his own and people would ask him his name, he would simply reply, "My only name is Jimmy—I haven't any other name." That was before he assumed the family name of Col. Fred Bailey, the advance agent for Robinson and Lake's Circus, who took young "Jimmy" on as an apprentice when he was around thirteen years old. McCaddon even reports that the kindly Fred Bailey "adopted" Jimmy and became his "foster father"—but surely this must have been an informal arrangement, much the same as in the *père d'élève* tradition found in the European circus, whereby a master, without going to any legal trouble, will confer his name on an especially promising pupil and take him or her into his family. Rather interestingly, McCaddon himself, upon going to work for his brother-in-law in 1876 when he was sixteen years old, became a part of this same tradition and for several years went by the name of "Joe M. Bailey." I say the "adoption" must have been an informal one, because when Bailey later married McCaddon's sister Ruth in 1868, it was not under the name of "Bailey" or even

"McGinnis," but under an entirely different surname: "Gordon." Incredible as it may seem, McCaddon claims that for the first fifteen years following her wedding—that is, until as late as 1883—his sister had no reason to suspect she was married to anyone other than "James A. Gordon"! And when the truth finally did come out, it was only through "accident."

Obviously, this is a fairly complicated subject, and I can only summarize it in the time available to me. It is further complicated by McCaddon's own financial involvement in it, for upon Bailey's death in 1906 his entire estate, estimated to be worth between 5 and 8 million dollars, went to his wife; and when she in turn died six years later, the estate passed exclusively to her side of the family, with McCaddon himself receiving around a third of it. Now the McGinnises were a fairly numerous and contentious tribe; and, rightly or wrongly, they thought they were entitled to a portion of this fortune. Consequently, there were several law suits over the estate following both Bailey's and his wife's deaths. I have looked into some of the documents relating to these actions, and they make for intriguing, occasionally disturbing reading. Talk about dysfunctional families! This one, by its own admission, suffered from hereditary insanity, which Bailey himself was said to have exhibited from the mid-1880s until the end of his life. One of his loving relatives even went so far as to assert he was a drug addict and so often out of his mind that, when traveling with the circus, his private railway car contained a padded cell for his use! Picture that scene in your imaginations, if you can: a sort of Bedlam-on-Wheels, with a crazy James A. Bailey staring out a barred window, barking orders at his men, and no doubt shouting obscenities at passing elephants. That would have been a "first" in circus or any kind of history, I think. There were other family afflictions as well. Two of Bailey's brothers appear to have done time in jail; one of his sisters—and I almost blush at having to report this—was so devoid of morals that she ran off with a "Frenchman"!

The plaintiffs in these actions—who for the most part were Bailey's nieces and nephews, since all of his brothers and sisters predeceased him (dying insane, naturally)—charged that both McCaddon and his sister had exerted undue influence over Bailey and had prevented them from visiting their dear uncle, even though he was extremely fond of them and had promised to buy them houses and a great

many other nice things. The defense countered that Bailey's mind was as "clear as a bell" and that, far from feeling any fondness for his blood relatives, Bailey "hated" the lot of them—the single exception being his older brother Edward or "Ned," the only member of the family who ever exhibited any kindness toward him—didn't want to see them, and certainly never intended to help them in any way. True or false? The former, I suspect, in view of Bailey's actions while he was alive. "Anyone not knowing the man and the reticence of his nature," McCaddon writes, referring to Bailey's secrecy in regard to his real name, "might assume there was something in his early life of which he was ashamed. There was, but not caused by any act of his."

According to what he supposedly told McCaddon about this early life, Jimmy was the youngest of seven children, born in Detroit in 1847 and orphaned at the time of his mother's death when he was eight years old. Apparently the family was by no means poor, for the mother left around \$20,000 to the children; and the husband of Jimmy's eldest sister Catharine, a Detroit alderman and politician named "Gordon," was appointed his guardian and took him in. There followed a period of blighted childhood that reads like something out of a novel by Dickens. "Instead of being treated as a ward for whom considerable provisions were made," McCaddon quotes Bailey as bitterly remarking, "I was made to work like a dog, and on the least provocation was whipped. My sister had boys of about my own age, and for their misdeeds I was punished. . . . I was worked so hard that I was always late at school, so I was continually being punished after school; and then for being late in getting home I was whipped again. I stood that treatment until I was about eleven years old." The only member of his family who ever stood up for little Jimmy, it seems, was his older brother "Ned."

But why then, you may ask, would Bailey ever wish to make use of the name of "Gordon" in preference to that of "McGinnis"? With all due respect to those who are forever harping on the subject of the *male* as abuser, I have to report it was not Mr. Gordon who did all this whip-

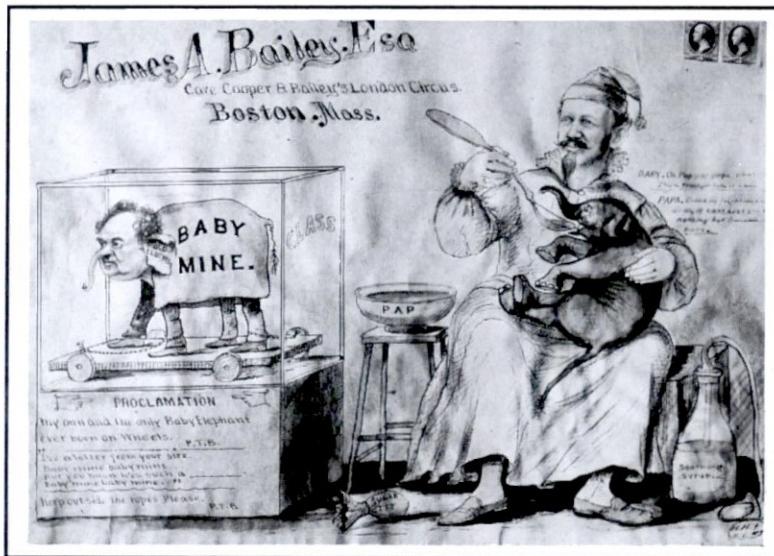


Joseph Terry McCaddon as pictured in the 1894 Adam Forepaugh route book. Pfening Archives.

ping, but Bailey's sister Catharine. And that, it seems to me, helps explain his decision during his early years, especially when he was in need of something for legal purposes like a marriage certificate and wasn't yet entirely comfortable with his mentor's surname, to make use of the one name while disowning the other. It was his own blood relatives—his sister in particular—he couldn't stand; and he wanted nothing, not even the family name he was born with, to remind him of his early life with them.

Except for his older brother Edward, of course. And here we finally near the end of this particular story. One day lit-

Cartoon about the baby elephant war between Cooper & Bailey and P. T. Barnum. Pfening Archives.



tle Jimmy and some friends were swimming in the Detroit River—an activity that was forbidden by law on account of the dangerous currents—when they saw some policemen approaching. Jimmy ran off, leaving some of his clothes on the bank; and knowing he was sure to receive another severe thrashing upon returning home, decided then and there to run away. And he never went back. What he didn't know at the time, however, was that his companions had not seen him leave the water. Consequently, those clothes left behind on the river bank were taken as evidence that he had drowned and his body had been carried away!

Years later—nearly a quarter of a century later, in fact—Bailey finally wrote a letter to his favorite brother "Ned" asking him to visit him while the circus was in Detroit. McCaddon, who was then going by the name of "Joe M. Bailey," happened to be on the lot when Ned showed up; and when Ned asked one of the employees where he could find "Mr. Bailey," he was mistakenly directed to McCaddon. "Are you Mr. Bailey's son?" the visitor tentatively inquired. "No," McCaddon replied, "brother-in-law." "My name is Edward McGinnis," the visitor continued. "Mr. Bailey wrote me he is my brother and asked me to come here."

That was the first time McCaddon or any member of his family, including Bailey's wife, had ever heard the name "McGinnis," and then only because of the employee's mistake in directing Ned to McCaddon. It's hard to say who was more surprised by all this: McCaddon and his sister at the discovery of Bailey's true name, or brother Ned upon learning that little Jimmy, so many years after he was believed to have drowned, was really

alive and going by an *assumed* name. The tortuous situation is reminiscent of the *anagnorisis* or "recognition" scene in classical Greek drama. And the restraint exhibited by the principal characters strikes me as almost "classical" as well. McCaddon writes that he took Ned to Bailey and introduced him by saying, "This gentleman says his name is Edward McGinnis and [he] wishes to see you." Then he simply adds, "They shook hands and I walked away."

McCaddon, as I've al-

ready mentioned, idolized his brother-in-law. By the time he got around to writing his memoir, he had even more reason to do so, since by then he had come into his share of Bailey's considerable estate. He is almost never critical of Bailey, no matter how hard-nosed and insensitive some decision of the latter may be; and what is perhaps the most egregious, not to say revealing, example of this occurred at the end of 1878 when the circus owned by Bailey and his early partner James E. Cooper, after making a tidy fortune touring the American West, Australia, and New Zealand, proceeded to lose most of it in South America while on its return to the U.S. The problem seems to have been one of "currency exchange," not the quality of the show or Bailey's management of it; but the result was that Bailey found he could not cover expenses and would have to cut the tour short. Now we have all heard of theatrical and other managers running out on their employees when payday was about to roll around, and circuses themselves have been guilty from time to time of that delightful practice known as "red-lighting." But somehow it seems to me that the stunt Bailey now pulled really takes the proverbial "cake."

Here I should add that this particular tour was McCaddon's own introduction to show business, and that during the first three years of his apprenticeship he received no salary at all—simply his board and clothes. After getting the company as far as Buenos Aires, Bailey announced that since transporting the animals to New York would be an expensive business, "all performers and others would have to pay their own fare home." And this, mind you, also went for his teenage brother-in-law and all the other unsalaried apprentices, including a young nephew and namesake of Cooper! Those who had no money saved for such emergencies were simply left to get back as best they could.

If anyone was outraged at this announcement, McCaddon never lets on. Here is what he has to say about it—only keep in mind he was writing this at least half a century later, so that we can only speculate about what he must have really felt at the time. "I have always thought Mr. Bailey was trying us out to see if we would work our way home as dining-room stewards or [at] other work, as performed by several performers who had squandered their money. I was quite sure at the last minute he would pay our fare, and I have always thought he was pleased to find we [meaning McCaddon and



James A. Bailey in 1888. The original photo is in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.

young Cooper] could take care of ourselves." And so they did, fortunately for them.

On a number of subsequent occasions Bailey again let his brother-in-law down hard, and at one point, after an argument over money (what else?), the two parted company for several years. But again, in retrospect McCaddon seems always willing to give Bailey the benefit of the doubt; and he was also, as self-appointed guardian of his brother-in-law's reputation, capable of becoming fiercely protective whenever anyone dared attack him. (The same applied to his sister, incidentally, for whom he once did battle with a journalist who had described her as a social climber.)

Around the turn of the century Bailey got up a stock company for his show properties that was incorporated in England. My own reading of the evidence is that this great business opportunity was not altogether what it was represented to be; and following Bailey's death even that old stalwart "Tody" Hamilton wrote a highly critical article about it. It was all a scheme, he claimed, to take in unsuspecting English investors with an inventory whose advertised value was inflated to twenty times its actual worth. Bailey himself profited hugely from the sale of the company's watered stock, he continues;

there is an English sucker also "born every sixty solar seconds." McCaddon, who retained a copy of the article for his files, has annotated it with the sarcastic comment "Exemplification of Gratitude" and goes on to explain in a typewritten note that Hamilton wrote the article to get even with Bailey's widow, who had refused to redeem for him, at par value, the 2,000 shares of stock Bailey had given Hamilton as a gift. True or false? This time I'm not altogether certain. But it was this same speculation that led to the break-up between Bailey and McCaddon, after the latter complained about never receiving any dividends for all the shares of stock he possessed.

* * *

Although I intend to keep the emphasis of this talk on Bailey's private life, I can't resist summarizing for you what McCaddon has to say about Bailey's peculiar qualities as a manager—all the more so since, of all the explanations I've read of Bailey's success in this area, McCaddon's strikes me as being the best and most plausible. The great advantage Bailey possessed over other circus owners, McCaddon writes, was that he began his career not with the show itself, but rather in the "advance," that all important department charged not only with advertising the coming of the circus on billboards and sides of buildings, in shop windows, in local newspapers, etc., but also with planning the show's route from town to town, obtaining necessary licenses and permits while winning over local officials, contracting for show grounds and provisions for all the employees and animals, and taking care of everything else necessary to ensure the show's favorable reception and smooth operation once it arrived. This was the department that Fred Bailey, Bailey's mentor and early employer, headed in Robinson and Lake's Circus; and where young Jimmy quickly became so proficient that, when he was barely into his teens, he was able to take over and discharge all these duties on his own whenever the colonel was absent.

"In the beginning of his career," McCaddon writes, "he had driven over the roads of all the midwest and southern states, year after year, in the horse and buggy days, in advance of the old-fashioned wagon shows . . . and he would familiarize himself with junctional points, distances, [and] the chief industries or products" of a region. Bailey possessed a "marvelous memory" for such details; and in later life, even when the circus was traveling abroad, he would quickly master the topography, transportation facilities, and all the other significant fea-

tures of any country the show happened to be in. Other circus owners like Adam Forepaugh never had the advantage of such an education. Consequently, they were at the mercy of their advance personnel; and whenever these proved lazy or incompetent, trouble, sometimes even financial ruin, was the inevitable result.

Not so with Bailey, however. He thoroughly *knew* the "advance" thanks to his early experience with it. Whenever anything went wrong in that department—as during the 1883 season when his top men there were hired away by another circus (Forepaugh's) with the promise of having their salaries doubled—he was prepared to wade in and take charge himself. Once he became an owner and began traveling with the show, he rapidly mastered the intricacies of all the other departments as well, thereby becoming—with the sole exception of performing in the ring, of course—a "complete" circus man.

Perhaps he was a little too "complete." Time and again one reads of his being unwilling or perhaps constitutionally unable to delegate authority. True, he would often solicit opinions on some matter from his subordinates. But after hearing them out, it was his ideas that usually prevailed—and woe to anyone who failed to go along with them! The threat of "instant dismissal" is a recurring theme in pronouncements and directions emanating from the front office. When McCaddon himself, after the circus returned to the States from South America at the end of 1878, transferred to the "advance" of the Cooper and Bailey show, his brother-in-law, referring to the experienced manager under whom he would be working, instructed him to "learn to obey orders. If he directs you to post a bill upside down, be sure you understand correctly and don't argue about it. Do as you are directed."

Elsewhere McCaddon writes that Bailey was in daily telegraph contact with the "advance," and that personnel in every department were expected to carry out his instructions precisely and were never permitted to initiate any important actions on their own. Even in the matter of advertising he was indefatigable. Artists from the Strobridge and Courier companies, who traveled to the show's headquarters each winter and spent weeks working from ideas he supplied for posters, would submit sketch after sketch to him until he expressed himself satisfied. When it came to small bills and newspaper advertisements, too, McCaddon claims, "he was extremely

particular that *his* ideas and *his* alone should be clearly expressed."

The picture that emerges from all this is one of Bailey endlessly "micro-managing" everything. I have run across descriptions of him taking an avid interest in the most trivial things, down to the purchase of a single pot of paint. One journalist who succeeded in interviewing him writes that, after putting in a twelve-hour day, Bailey would go home to continue thinking about the circus and then to *dream* about it. Another writer describes him as becoming upset whenever anyone was caught sneaking into the show, and as actually sitting outside the tent to watch for anyone trying to do so! He was obsessed with every detail of the circus—McCaddon himself at one point describes him as being "a great and active detail man"—and while no doubt this helps explain his great success as a manager, one might also expect it to have taken a toll on his nerves and constitution. Perhaps, too, as I rather suspect, it was Bailey's peculiar psychological makeup—the traumatic events of his childhood, especially, when he discovered he could not count on even his closest relatives for affection or support—that caused him to find it so difficult to rely on others in later life.

* * *

This steel engraving pictures James A. Bailey in the early 1890s. Pfening Archives.

Somehow, for all the sympathy one feels for him on account of his wretched childhood, I can't bring myself to *like* James A. Bailey very much. My own impression, after reading McCaddon's memoir and all the other sources to which I've had access over the years, is that he was a rather heartless, cheerless individual. Yes, he was said to be devoted to his wife (and McCaddon, for self-evident reasons, labors to pump up that legend as well); and we do have that picture of the long-lost "Jimmy," presumably struggling manfully to keep his emotions in check, silently shaking hands with his brother "Ned." But then there is also that "hated" he allegedly felt for all his other blood relatives; there were no children or grandchildren for him to be photographed with while bouncing them on his knee; and in fact I've seen nothing

to convince me that Bailey genuinely cared for children, or people in general, the way his convivial partner P. T. Barnum did. Can anyone recall his ever playing a practical joke? Can anyone—perhaps more revealingly—recall his ever being the *butt* of such a joke? Even the easy-going Barnum, McCaddon writes, never dared refer to his young partner as other than "Mister Bailey." It was only within the confines of his home that his wife and brother-in-law felt free to call him "Jimmy."

From a psychological viewpoint, however, Bailey does present a far more challenging picture than most of his contemporaries I can think of. In addition to his almost pathological shyness, he appears to have been a perpetually nervous, high-strung individual. Again, perhaps his unhappy childhood—all those beatings at the hand of his sister—was in part responsible for this. Perhaps, too, there really was something to his relatives' claim that he suffered from some "hereditary" defect in his mental makeup. McCaddon, seeking to refute the charge that he and his sister had exerted undue influence on Bailey, naturally enough denied this in court; yet his own memoir reveals Bailey was frequently ill and unable to work from 1885 onward.

That was the year, as related in my biography of Barnum, that he suffered a severe "nervous breakdown" and had to retire from circus management for a good two years. In the attempt to convince his readers there must have been some *external* cause for this collapse, McCaddon blames the whole thing on Barnum, whose "constant nagging and fault-finding," whose "fussiness, continuous suggestions, and interference" in the running of the show, finally drove Bailey over the edge. He even charges Barnum with having done the same thing to his earlier circus partner W. C. Coup! True or false? This time I believe McCaddon, who rarely had a good word to say about P. T. Barnum, deliberately distorts the picture.

Neither Bailey nor Coup, to my knowledge, ever made such an accusation themselves; and the latter, in fact, upon Barnum's death in 1891, wrote



for publication in the *New York Clipper* a revealing account of their partnership, mentioning, among other things, that it "was in every way a pleasant and successful one." If Barnum really did have such a devastating effect on Bailey, one can't help wondering why Bailey, after recovering from his breakdown, returned in the fall of 1887 to become Barnum's partner again and willingly *continued* as such until the elder showman's death four years later. Barnum was indeed in the habit of bombarding Bailey and just about everyone else he knew with "suggestions" and advice—but as his extant letters to Bailey prove, far from "constantly nagging" or otherwise "interfering" in the running of the show, he rarely insisted on having his own way and was invariably respectful, even deferential, toward his younger partner. He genuinely liked and admired Bailey, and I find it difficult to believe these feelings were not reciprocated to at least some degree.

To return to McCaddon's memoir, however, there is plenty of evidence for Bailey's less than perfect health following his nervous breakdown in 1885. In May of 1887, for example, while vacationing in New Jersey, Bailey suffered another "serious collapse" that lasted several weeks and for a time actually rendered him "unconscious." Precisely what the matter was McCaddon doesn't specify (Barnum was nowhere in sight!); but from other documents I have seen I believe it may have been a stroke. Bailey himself, in connection with an early court battle with his "hated" relatives, is quoted as acknowledging he was "very sick in my head" in the early part of 1886 [sic] and as also suffering at that time an attack of "paralysis." As late as the season of 1903, after Barnum had been safely dead for twelve years, he is described by McCaddon as being on the verge of another "nervous breakdown," this time brought on by some "labor troubles" the circus was then experiencing. For several years toward the end of Bailey's life, too, McCaddon boasts that he possessed an unrestricted power-of-attorney over not only Bailey's business but also his personal affairs. That in itself, to my way of thinking, tells something about the precarious state of Bailey's health and the fears over what might happen should he suddenly become incapacitated or die. He was by no means a robust individual, either physically or emotionally.

Which brings me to the matter of his



Bailey on a Barnum & Bailey lot around 1904. Pfening Archives.

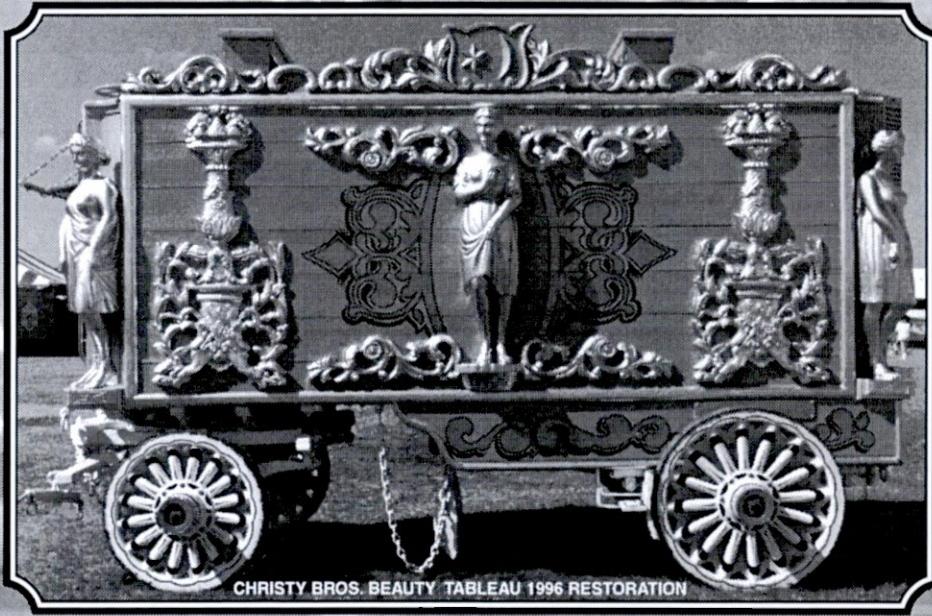
death and my sincere hope that by now you have all sufficiently digested your dinners! Probably you have read or heard that old wives' tale about Bailey's being bitten by a mosquito inside Madison Square Garden and his subsequently being carried off by erysipelas. The last is a kind of streptococcal infection, easily cured today with antibiotics. But they weren't available in Bailey's day, of course; and Bailey, who did indeed come down with an acute form of this illness, died at his home in Mt. Vernon, New York, some five days after contracting it. A number of the doctors and specialists who attended him believed he might have picked up the germ in Madison Square Garden, carried there in some cartloads of dirt that had been brought in to prepare the arena for the annual opening of the circus. But the actual mechanism of transmission was not any mosquito, but Bailey himself, after he had stomped around in and become contaminated with this dirt. For some years, McCaddon writes, Bailey had been in the habit of plucking out with his bare fingers the hairs that grew in his nostrils, and occasionally this would lead to an infection, causing a slight sore to form. This time the infection,

which began in his nose before spreading to both sides of his head and right elbow, proved deadly. McCaddon claims to have been present when his brother-in-law died. "And thus passed to his long, last rest a great and indomitable spirit," he writes rather conventionally.

Almost immediately McCaddon's sister gave him the power to act for her in all matters relating to Bailey's show properties. He quickly sold off to the Ringling brothers Bailey's half-interest in the Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Combined Shows (at an earlier date the Ringlings had acquired their initial half-interest in this)—then began negotiations, he writes, to form a holding company with the brothers that would have included their own circus and the Forepaugh-Sells Shows; and, as the contribution from the Bailey estate, the Barnum & Bailey Show and Bailey's interest in Buffalo Bill's Wild West. But it was "sometimes difficult to get the five brothers to agree upon an important matter," he complains, and this idea fell through. The Ringlings then made an offer to buy all the assets of the Barnum & Bailey circus—and the rest, as the saying goes, is "history."

McCaddon's memoir ends around this point, even though he did continue to manage and represent the estate's interest in the Buffalo Bill show for some years to come. But again, it was never his main objective to chronicle his own career in the entertainment world (although from time to time he does supply some fascinating insights into that area), but rather that of his celebrated brother-in-law. That the picture he paints of Bailey is not always as deep or complete as we might wish it to be is hardly McCaddon's fault, in my opinion. Bailey is not, even for a professional biographer, an easy subject; and as a number of the stories I've been telling you make abundantly clear, sometimes even his closest family members had difficulty penetrating the secrecy with which he so often cloaked his private affairs. Whether he truly was, as Conover claimed, the "world's most successful showman" (and I obviously have some opinions of my own on that topic!) I am content to let others decide. There can be little doubt, however, that Bailey does represent one of the world's most elusive showmen; and hence any document that throws new light on his life and character is bound to merit our attention. For all its self-interest and other faults, McCaddon's long-lost memoir certainly does that.

Season's Greetings



CHRISTY BROS. BEAUTY TABLEAU 1996 RESTORATION

From The Staff



OWNED BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN



GREETINGS AND BEST WISHES FOR THE
Holidays
AND THE
New Year.

TOMMY - STRUPPI - NELLIE

During the 1985 Circus Historical Society convention, long-time member Dr. Gordon Brown had the opportunity to interview fellow CHS member Tom Barron about his career in the circus business in the 1920s and 1930s. What follows is the result of that interview which took place during a bus ride on June 22, 1985 to visit the homes of the great showmen who lived in and near Somers, New York. The tapes were transcribed by Evelyn Riker, and checked for accuracy by Fred Dahlinger, Jr. and Riker in May 1995. The original cassette tapes are on file at the Circus World Museum's library.

Brown: Tom, do you want to tell us when and where you were born?

Barron: I was born in Howell, Michigan. That's about half way between Detroit and Lansing, a little town of about 3,000 population then, and is still about the same. We had two railroads that went through the town, one on each side of the town, and because it was a county seat, the circuses found out it was a good spot to show in. As a kid I went to Sun Brothers, 101 Ranch, and Sparks. They used to come there, and then Campbell, Bailey & Hutchinson later on, and we always had at least one circus every summer. In the next town, there was an old guy by the name of Work Bryan, and he had been an acrobat with the Barnum show way back in the old days. Because the circus was the big entertainment, I heard about him and got acquainted with him. I would talk with him in the wintertime after the circuses came. He at that time was working for Tiger Bill's Wild West, which was out of Charlotte, Michigan, and that was a small, wild west type of show. They only had sidewall, and they did night shows.

Brown: What do you call that over the seats, a canopy?

Barron: Well, 101 Ranch had sort of like an awning; they [Tiger Bill] had nothing like that at all. Just a few blues and an open space there that was roped off where they would do some cowboy things, and so on. He [Bryan] did talking clown numbers, because it was a small show and that kind of thing would go. Because of being acquainted with him, I went with him as soon as I got out of school for the first year, and just during the school vacation.

Brown: Because you're a man of letters and we know how many languages you speak. Tell us how far you went in school in those days.

An Interview With TOM BARRON "World's Tallest Clown"

Barron: I graduated from the University of Michigan.

Brown: How old were you then?

Barron: I was about 21 or 22. I had finished up at the University. After two summers and doing other work in the wintertime, with Tiger Bill, I decided that if I wanted to get into the circus business, I'd better get with a real circus. So the Gollmar Bros. Circus was a five-car show, and it played my hometown in June, I think it was. Work Bryan was with the show then, and I went down and asked how the chances were of getting a job on the show. He said, "No." The other clown was John Lancaster, and they were both talking clowns, because it was a one ring show. In August I got a letter from him, saying he understood they were going to enlarge to a ten-car show, and if I still wanted to come on the show, maybe they would hire me. In the meantime, I bought the *Billboard* every week, because I was interested in show business. In those days, it had everything,

This photo of Tom Barron, on left, and S. W. Bailey appeared in the September 14, 1929 *Billboard*. Barron appears to be standing on his toes making him look even taller. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.



the vaudeville, the tent shows.

About the middle of August in 1924, this ad came out in the *Billboard* that Gollmar Brothers wanted performers, clowns, and so on, and write to an address in Peru, Indiana. I wrote and got a letter back, \$10 a week they would pay. I only got \$5 a week with Tiger

Bill. I did a little bit of everything on that show, including learning to do the frog act, the contortion, because Work Bryan had been a contortionist and acrobat, and he said that was a popular act in those days. I did Roman standing riding, and one of the big clown numbers for the talking show was Jargo, the giraffe, and I was the front end of the giraffe because I was tall. Just generally useful is what it really amounted to.

Back to the Gollmar show, I got a letter back with a contract. \$10 a week. Well, that sounded pretty good, \$10 really in those days was not too bad because when I graduated from high school, four years before that, my uncle was president of a bank in town and he offered me a job in the bank for \$40 a month. So that's \$10 a week, see? Besides, you got your room and board. Anyhow, I arrived in on the show. I was still in the stage where I had no trunk. I just had two suitcases, cardboard suitcases.

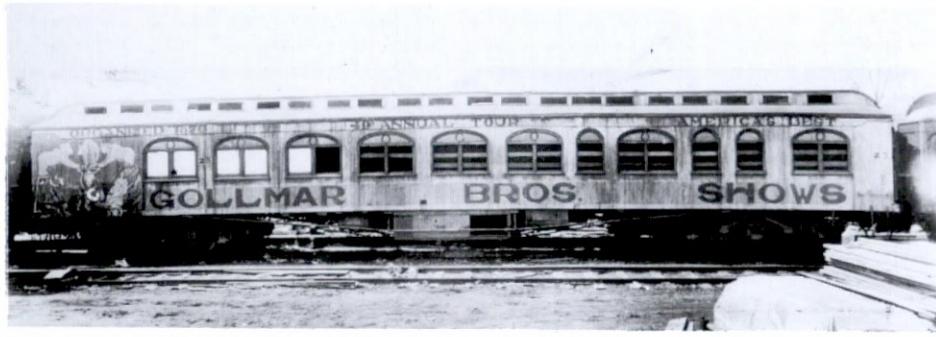
The food in the cookhouse, as I remember, was good. The accommodations on the train were terrible. We slept three high and two in a bunk. It rained every day. The weather was just horrible.

Brown: What was the breakdown of the cars, can you remember?

Barron: Gollmar Bros. had three tunnel cars that had formerly been advance cars and two sleepers. Half of one sleeper was a pie car. All of the wagons were loaded in the tunnel cars. There were four animal cages, a ticket wagon and six baggage wagons. Other equipment was carried in the tunnel cars and some of the baggage wagons doubled back to gilly this stuff. The circus had three elephants that were leased from the [American Circus] Corporation. They also loaded in one of the tunnel cars.

Brown: How many people on the show?

Barron: Well, I was going to say, the performance started with this little walkaround spec. We had an Italian band called Bindl's Band, and they were new. I forgot what they had as a band when it was a five car show, but the Italian band was new for this ten



car show. And there was, maybe, five or six pieces, and I understood they came off of a carnival. Lorette was the name of this one woman that I waited on, like, for her iron jaw act. We had two women that did iron jaw with the butterfly, and they also did swinging ladders. The performance wasn't that bad, but there were more grifters on the show than there were performers. I remember Joe Metcalf was in charge of the elephants. He had maybe three or four, I don't remember, but not that many. This was the Gollmar show that went broke in 1925.

Brown: We were talking about the grifters.

Barron: Oh, yes. We had three card Monte, the shell game, then we had the connection man, we had all that.

Brown: Tell about that.

Barron: We had a small menagerie. When you went in the main entrance, you went through the menagerie top, and on that show was small. We had the elephants, the horses, and all the animals there. Then from that tent you walked into the big top; and between the big top and the menagerie there was a space of about six or seven feet [wide]. It was sidewalled, but no canvas above, and there would always be a man standing there with a great big satchel full of silver money, and they called him "the connection man." He would tell the people, "We're leaving town tonight, we've got all this silver and would you please help me out. We'll exchange this for paper money." And, of course, he would shortchange them every time, see. And those shows in those days all had "connection men," and they were really shortchange artists.

Brown: There must have been people who found out about that when they got to their seats. Did they ever come back?

Barron: Oh, yes. Because we had no name on the railroad cars [not true] and when we got back into Tennessee and Kentucky, back in the real hillbilly country, a couple of times they fired shots at the train at night, rifles or shotguns, because they were so mad that they got shortchanged. More than

A Tunnel car used by Chester Monihan's Gollmar Bros. Circus in 1925.

once they cut a lot of the guy ropes on the big top. It was one of those things that you were on pins and needles all the time about whether you were going to get out of town. And still I stayed with the thing, you know.

I remember George Voise was the guy I slept with on the train. He had been a bar performer, and his son Harold was one that worked with Eddie Ward out of Bloomington, Illinois. And he worked with his troupe a while, and then he, Bert Doss and Bob Brooks formed a three man flying act, a real good one. They were on the Floto show when I was there. Anyhow, to get back to George, the clowns on the show were Work Bryan, John Lancaster, George Voise and myself, and George was a great one for getting acquainted with the girls in every town, and so I would always be in the bunk asleep, and he would come in and wake me up. We slept head to foot, you know, and the cars were real old, terrible, terrible cars. We were lucky that it was cold and rainy, because otherwise the bed bugs would have eaten us up.

George Voise, the guy I was telling you about, part of his wardrobe was like a crazy woman's hat. And I remember in some little country town we were in down in Tennessee or Kentucky, I went into this hat store between shows, because he would never leave the lot, and I talked to the woman and asked if she had any old hats, kinda out of style, that I could have--because I had no money to buy them, we weren't getting paid. She went into the back room and brought out about a dozen hats that were out of style, some of them had feathers on them and so on, and I brought them back to George and he wore them with . . . he had sort of a conventional clown costume and his makeup was that his mouth looked like a big slice of watermelon, and he wore these women's hats, and for a tie he had these two women's gloves that were stuffed, you know. And I gave him those hats that this woman gave me, I guess I had to tell her I was with the

circus, but they told us not to tell the people in town that we were with the show because of the trouble they were having with the grift, you know. And the old timers would tell me, "Now, don't tell them you're with the show."

Brown: Did they pay you off at all?

Barron: Nothing. Not a nickel.

Brown: You worked the whole season for nothing.

Barron: Well, it was a short season, only about six or seven weeks. We got our room and board, of course, and experience. Anyway, Work Bryan had told me that if I wanted to get ahead and be a clown. I also did contortion. There were two of us that did the frog men on that show.

Anyway, when Gollmar closed I had to wire home for money, and George Voise had nobody at home, and his son was working with Eddie Ward's act on the Hagenbeck show, so I loaned him some money. We got on the train and got back to Michigan; he lived in Saginaw and I lived in this little town of Howell.

The next year when I joined the John Robinson show, I didn't know that he was going to be there, but there was George in French Lick, Indiana for the John Robinson show, with all these damned hats that I had given him. I've never seen or known another clown who all the time would have an outfit where he'd be in drag, like Lou Jacobs with the baby carriage, or something like that, but George would wear these women's hats. He'd maybe wear three or four different hats during the show, but it always had to be one of these old women's hats that I'd gotten for him in the backwoods in hillbilly country.

Brown: So you made his act? What was your most elaborate costume, would you say?

Barron: Probably the original washing machine. It was like a float. It was a platform maybe about seven feet long and about a foot and a half wide, and there was a small palm tree on either end of it, and I was sitting on it with black tights and a black Negro mask with a bone through my nose, on top of an alligator. And there was a clothes line that ran from one palm tree to the other and little grass skirts hanging on this clothes line. And I had a grass skirt on and dummy legs that were hanging over the edge of this thing, you see, and I would be bouncing up and down and scrubbing this grass skirt on this alligator. Pat Valdo thought that was wonderful. And the alligator was on this imitation grass and it looked quite elaborate because of the palm trees and everything else. Then, the whole thing was covered

with a black curtain, a cloth, because I had four bicycle wheels to get it over rough tracks. I would strap this thing to my waist, so then as I would push ahead on the thing, it would move. And I would stop in front of the people and jump up and down and do extra washing maneuvers and so on.

For clown walkarounds, I had . . . there used to be an ad "Time to Retire," the rubber companies advertised that, so I had like a nightgown on and a rubber tire and a night cap on and carried a candle. That was one walk-around that I did. There, again, I was in the Jargo number. Then, Dorothy Herbert was on that show, and she was married to a horse trainer named Ray Thompson, and she rode manege. He had maybe four horses for a liberty act, and he also had the January mule act. So I worked with him in the January mule act. I was the driver to drive it in first, then I got out to push the mule up when he was sitting down, and pulled on his halter to try to get him up; and got out of the way when he started bucking. Also, I drove that same mule cart in the parade, because we paraded every day.

Then I had another thing--Zack Terrell liked this. I had, you know the kind of a dress that Queen Elizabeth would have, you know, the big hoop skirt and the red velvet and the gold trimming, with the big collar in the back. Well, I got the idea for this one when the show was in St. Louis, I think, and I went to the costume shop and they made this thing for me. It had four legs that went down so that it would stand on the ground by itself, you see, and I could get inside this and my head would just show around the collar. There was a hat above my head that was fastened to the collar. This character was carrying like a big handbag--like a briefcase--and I would get into the thing and walk and the frame would be resting on my shoulders and

my head would be showing, then I would stop in front of the audience and I would lift the thing up, and I had like women's bloomers under it and big feet shoes, and I would raise the thing up so the bloomers would show beneath the skirt. And I would whirl it around and dance around, then I would put it down and the briefcase would open up and I would stick my head out of the briefcase and yell, see? It was what I called a "yeller gag." But it was a surprise to the people to see this clown's head coming out of the briefcase. Then I would get up and stand under it and walk on a little farther and do the thing over again.

But then I had other things that would mean nothing nowadays. I would do current events. One of the walk-arounds that I had for that period, and only that period, was when movie theaters were getting talking pictures for the first time. They would advertise "100 percent talkies," so you'd see these signs around in the movie theaters. So I went to this prop place in Chicago and had two fancy gold frames made, and the back of it was black cloth and the front of it was all black cloth, and then I had them make like two old maids' old time jackets and the hats to go with them and the curls that hang down, and another other guy and myself - one would be in one picture frame and one in the other--these two ladies, and down below the sign said, "100% talkies." We would be talking back and forth all the time, see, as we walked around the hippodrome track. That was only good for about one year at that time, then throw it out. I think I sold it to somebody. This was on the Floto show in 1929. That's when they were just starting with talkies.

One thing, we had no work on Sunday, so we could go to a hotel if we could afford it. The only trouble was,

The back yard of the John Robinson Circus around 1926.



we didn't have any money, because we weren't getting paid. But the thing is, that taught me a good lesson. To get back to the thing, it just went on, and we paraded, business was bad. Finally, after about six or seven weeks, we woke up one morning and instead of going south, like into Mississippi, we were heading back into West Baden, Indiana. So the Corporation brought us back there, because at that time the John Robinson show was wintering in West Baden. But they were still on the road when we got back. So then I had to wire home for money.

Brown: Tell me how many performers would there have been, and how many grifters.

Barron: It seems like . . . well, in the mens' dressing room: Grover McCabe, he was an acrobat; four of us clowns; Chubby Guilfoyle and the other guy who was the cat man. I think that would be as many as there were in the men's dressing room. I can't remember any more. In the women's dressing room there would be: Tetu, this Japanese gal; Tetu Robinson; Grover's wife Helena; Lorette, who did the iron jaw and swinging ladder; and Dorothy Herbert; and then a woman cat trainer, because the arena was up for a long time because they had different cat acts--like the lions and then the tigers, then they'd have the leopards, but only three or four at a time, very small act. Dolly Jacobs, she was on the show. Not Lou Jacobs daughter, you know, this was way back.

Brown: Was she Terrell Jacobs' wife? Her name was Dolly, also.

Barron: Well, that would be the one, then. He wasn't on the show. That was it. Most of the time we'd have like two iron jaw acts, swinging ladder acts; they also did two web acts, then we'd do the January mule in the center ring, and after the arena was down we did the Jargo, then we'd do simple walkarounds that we had. And Tetu Robinson worked alone in center ring. She had a slack wire, but she had nice Japanese wardrobe and was classy looking; it shouldn't have been with that show, really. In fact, I don't know why she wasn't with one of the better shows. The next year, she was on the John Robinson show when I was with them, a bigger and much better show.

Some of the guys that I had gone to school with were working at the State Mental Institution in Pontiac, Michigan, in the kitchen and dining room. So I wasn't going to hang around my hometown, and I wasn't going to do any work there, and I still was interested in the circus. So I thought I would go over there [Pontiac] and get

a job in the winter. You worked in the kitchen and what you had were carts about six feet long and maybe about five feet high and about three feet wide that you would load with food, and they had this underground railway, like, and you would push this along underground and you would come to a dumbwaiter and you would put so much food on for that particular ward or area. And this underground railway ran from one side under the women's area and the other side under the men's area. Then the patients there who were not violent came to the regular dining room, as it were. But we had nothing to do with that; all we had to do was just wheel the food for the three meals a day, and we'd have like one day a week off. And we had good living quarters. We had wonderful food, and the head chef there was an Englishman, I remember, and he had a tall, white hat and always had a nice white uniform on. So that gave me an idea for a walk around.

Anyway, Work Bryan said, "If you want to get ahead, you've got to have some big props, you gotta have some good walkarounds, and don't keep the same thing every year . . . change things; because most of these clowns have the same thing every time, every year, and they keep saying, 'Give me more money and I'll have better props,' but that doesn't work out that way. You've got to have better props before you get the money." Anyway, Work told me that.

I should learn to play an instrument for the clown band. As a kid I had taken some violin lessons, and I hated that, anyway, I figured out the clarinet was about the easiest instrument to carry, so I went to a hock shop in Pontiac and bought a clarinet. Then I went to school and took clarinet lessons two or three nights a week so that when I wrote to different circuses I told them I could play clarinet in the clown band. But I could play, maybe, two tunes. I finally got a job with John Robinson Circus, \$20 a week.

Brown: And that was also a Corporation show?

Barron: That was their No. 3 show, as it were.

Brown: When was that?

Barron: That would be 1926.

Brown: Then you worked in the hospital about a year?

Barron: Oh, no. I just worked in the hospital from the time the Gollmar



Polar bear trainer Theodore Schroeder and his wife on John Robinson.

show went broke until John Robinson opened in the spring.

Brown: Oh, I see. That would have been June through the following spring?

Barron: No, I went to work at the hospital in November, and worked until April, when we opened with the John Robinson show. And I went back to West Baden, Indiana, because that's where their winter quarters were. I can remember, that was sort of the spa resort part of the town; there was West Baden and French Lick, the two towns. In West Baden, one of the guys in the Corporation. . . . was it Ed Ballard, I think it was . . . had this big hotel with a gambling casino and all these thermal baths and everything, and the railroad cars used to come in with these millionaires with their private cars onto the siding there. And French Lick is actually where the show opened, but it was like walking across the street.

Brown: Was there a lot of gambling? Was gambling legalized there at that time?

Barron: It was there. I think it was sort of undercover, but gambling wasn't legalized in the state at all. In that hotel they did it, with their guests, and they could control it that way. Anyway, we opened with John Robinson. Now that was a good three ring circus. And there I rode a horse in spec, and then we had no clown band, but in the meantime, I was practicing all the time between shows, I'd go out in the woods, away from the lot, and practice my clarinet, because I wanted to get qualified so that when the time came, I could at least play something.

Anyhow, on that show, we had a lot of people from the Al G. Barnes show, because there had been some kind of turmoil and falling out over there. The

equestrian director was Bob Thornton, who had been with John. We had a wonderful polar bear act, the best one that had probably ever been in this country until Ursula came along, by the name of Ted Schroeder, who came from the Hagenbeck Zoo in Germany. Ringling had had him for two years, then after that they sold the act to the Corporation. And he was on the Robinson show. . . . that was his first year, I think, 1926 and 1927. Then he went to Detroit and he became head

of the Detroit Zoo. He was very successful in breeding polar bears there, because he liked polar bears, and that was the main exhibit in the new Detroit Zoo, that he had something to do with. I visited with him and his wife there many times.

Brown: How long was he in the circus business before he went there?

Barron: He started as a kid in Germany, I would say, working for Hagenbeck in the zoo in Hamburg, and then, let's see, Hagenbeck not only had the zoo in Hamburg, he also had a tented circus, and was a great animal importer and exporter, and he had crews that would go to the Arctic and Africa, and so on, and get these animals for the zoos and circuses. Then he had a traveling circus in Germany. These acts that he would have—he would have like an elephant act, he'd have a tiger act, or a bear act, and he would rent them out or sell them to other circuses. Once they would train them at their zoo in winter quarters, and once the act was qualified, and he had no use for them any longer in his circus, then he would sell it. Like, Ringlings would buy acts and other shows would buy acts, you see, from him. This Ted Schroeder came to America. At the time he came to the United States it was, maybe, 1922 or 1923. I'd say he was a man in his late thirties, because he had a daughter about 16 or 17. He had, maybe, eight polar bears, and they were not as big as Ursula Boettcher's, I'm sure, but they were impressive looking animals, and he had a nice polar bear act.

Let me get back to the spec, first. We had lots of colored working men on the shows in those days, and the specs were always like an African thing, always had some kind of an Oriental theme, or something. We had a lot of performers on the show, but they wanted to make the spec even bigger, so those of us that would ride on hors-

es, we would just get in once. But the band would start, they would play for half an hour in center ring, then they would get up and start walking around.

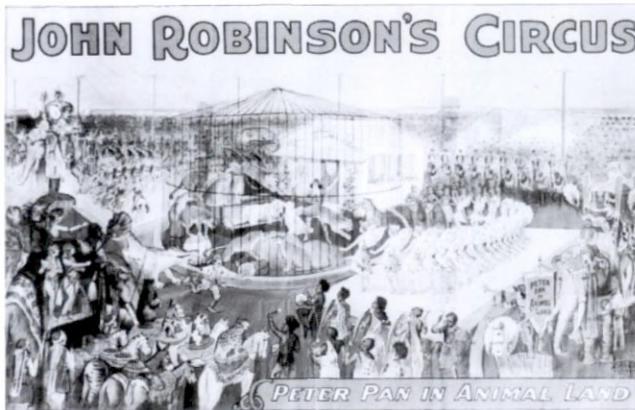
Brown: Who had the band, do you remember?

Barron: Wade Zumwalt, who was also a mail agent. Anyway, so then the spec would start, and after a short period all these colored guys would come in, there would be about forty or fifty of them with robes and headpieces on, and then as they came out of the big top they had a special tent for them. They would go in there and take those robes off, and they would have on less clothes. They would go back in again and change, and make three trips around the big top, and each time with less clothes on, the last trip they would have on savage type of clothing; but it made a big spec! And we had a prima donna that would sit up on top of the elephant in a howdah and sing. Of course there was no amplification or anything, but these gals had powerful voices. Then the show would start. We would have, maybe, the polar bear act or the cat act, I forget, some act to open the show. We only had two aerial acts. Emmett Kelly and his wife Eva did a double trap act; over the other ring Cecile Fortuna did a very nice single trap act. She was from an old circus performing family. Then we'd have another cat act, it might be lions, then we would have a couple of foot jugglers, then we'd have another cat act--the arena was up most of the show, because the show was really copied after Al G. Barnes, and his idea was to have just two things, wild animals and clowns--and we had a lot of clowns. Then we would have swinging ladders between the quarter poles, and I remember we had to swing those ladders and sing the song about something or the other.

Because of my bad experience with the Gollmar show, I decided I was not going to depend on the show for salary, but I was going to have a sideline. You see, we had no parades on that show, we didn't have to be on the lot until matinee time.

Brown: This was around the first year when Robinson didn't have parades, about 1926?

Barron: No, I think they had cut out parades two or three years before that. I'm sure it wasn't the first year, but I may be wrong. Anyway, we had no parade, so we had to be on the lot for the matinee, go to the cookhouse after the matinee, then we had nothing to do until the night show. And the Bill-



John Robinson Circus lithograph used in 1926.

board in those days had all kinds of classified ads for all kinds of things to sell, signs, etc., and there was one company in California that advertised "Chinese Horn Nuts" from San Francisco. They looked like the head on view of a water buffalo, they were black and were maybe two inches across from point to point, or from the ends of the horns. You put them in water and a flower would grow out of them, see. I remember they cost two cents apiece, so I ordered 100 of them. They came on the show, so in the morning before I went to the lot, or between shows, I would go house to house selling them for twenty-five cents apiece, and I would have a colored picture showing how they would look, and told the people I was working my way through college, because people frowned on circus people as a bunch of Gypsies and bums, and I sold out in no time at all. So then I kept ordering like a thousand at a time, see, and I was making more money selling the Chinese Horn Nuts than I was getting from the show. I would send the money home to put in the bank and my father would say, "What are you doing, shortchanging people?"

Brown: Tell us, how many houses would you go to on a usual morning.

Barron: It would all depend. I was a great tourist, so I would always be interested in seeing the high spots in that particular town, but always from the train to the lot I would stop at maybe a dozen houses, and some would buy and some wouldn't. In those days, people were friendly, would come to the door. They weren't worried about all the problems we have now days. At the end of season I made a lot more money on the Chinese Horn Nuts than I did on the money the show paid me. The show paid off every week, and our only expenses were we had to pay a dollar for the water boy who filled our buckets, and a dollar to the porter on the train,

and there again, I was sleeping with George Voise, but we were only two high, so it wasn't quite so bad.

Brown: How many cars on that train?

Barron: That was a 25 car show.

Brown: And how many passenger cars would there be?

Barron: Oh, I don't know; I would say maybe five. They didn't worry about parade equipment, but it was a 25 car show, a three ring circus with plenty of acts all the time, but primarily wild animals. And we must have had probably eight or ten elephants, and we had a lot of horses because they had three 12 horse liberty acts, besides manege, and they would finish the show with a chariot race and the Roman standing, and the jumps, that was all part of the show. Then we had a good wild west concert, we had maybe five or six Indians, families, the Sioux Indians--all the shows in those days had Indians for the concert that they'd get from the reservation.

Brown: Who was the cowboy star?

Barron: We didn't have any real cowboy star. We had a guy by the name of Carlos Carreon. He did whip cracking, and so on; and he worked in one of the liberty horse acts. His wife did manege. Otto Griebling worked in the riding act. He hadn't started clowning yet.

Dale Riker: What did Griebling do before he started clowning?

Barron: He worked in riding acts, strictly, because Reno McCree was the comedy man, the clown in the act, like Poodles in his act, and Otto just worked straight. And we had an act from Germany. It was some kind of a half-baked balancing act, I forgot what it was, and they called it "Poppa and Mama and Hannah" and Hannah married Otto, that was his first wife. Later on, they were separated and I think they had one or two children, and she married one of the Hodginis; and for several years she was in charge of the wardrobe on the Ringling show, before the days of the two units, before the Felds got involved.

Brown: In the late 1960's?

Barron: No, in the 1950's, wouldn't it be?

Brown: Tell me, what was your act like?

Barron: Like a frolic--just another act, you know. Contortionists were a dime a dozen. I was a front bender, there were very few men who were back benders. Albert Powell was a terrific back bender, he was on the Ring-

ling Show when I was there and did the aerial contortion act; and then this young fellow that Ringling has now . . . so anyway, I found out that I could make more money being a clown as long as I had good new props and all, so then I worked on just trying to build my reputation up, sending publicity blurbs into *Billboard* for them to publish, if they would, and so on. Then when you get known and you've got some kind of a reputation, then you're in a position where you can bargain; because my idea was every year I had to get more money. If I couldn't get any more money there wasn't any future in the business, then I'd get the hell out and do something else.

Brown: You were billed as "The World's Tallest Clown."

Barron: Well, the wardrobe accentuated my height, you see, and I was very skinny in those years, and whether I was or not, I don't know, but I just took that title and used it.

Brown: Did you use a top hat?

Barron: Oh, yes, and like on the Gentry Show, I wore red tights with white stripes in them and very tight red band-like jacket with some gold things on it, and a band hat that was about three times as high as an ordinary bandsman would wear. In those days there was no problem in getting wardrobe, if you had ideas. In Chicago, St. Louis and New York, the bigger cities, you could go to these costume houses and they would make stuff up for you in just a couple of days. I remember I got an idea when I was on the road with the Floto Show in 1929 for a new walkaround thing, and we were in St. Louis and were going to be there for three or four days, so I went and looked up a costume house and had them make the outfit for me.

Brown: Was there graft on John Robinson's at that time?

Barron: No, no. I think the Corporation shows, Hagenbeck and Wallace, and John Robinson cut their graft out in 1920-21 [actually 1923], because then they became what they called "Sunday School shows" mainly because of Ringling forcing them to do it, because they gave them all kinds of publicity when they had grifters, you know, and it got to the stage where they could no longer afford to be a graft show if they were going to get circus patrons.

But, then, I found about Chinese Horn Nuts through the *Billboard* advertisements, and that was an ideal thing to peddle, because they were small and you could carry out a pocketful of them for what you would use in the morning, and another pocketful, say, between shows, and there were

some historical things in the city that I wanted to see, and I'd always peddle in the morning, but not always in the afternoon. That went on for John Robinson in 1926, the Gentry show in 1927 and 1928, and then something happened. The company I was getting them from in San Francisco went out of business and I couldn't find any other supplier for them.

In the meantime, these other people were advertising signs and all sorts of things, you know, to sell. So I sent for some different samples of things, I finally decided that I would try aspirin tablets. You bought a card and they had these little packages of two aspirin tablets for a nickel, I believe it was, the store would sell. You see, this was in the days of prohibition, plenty of speakeasys and bars all around, and corner grocery stores, and those were the targets I worked. These cards were approximately fifteen inches wide and fifteen inches high, they would have all these packets of aspirin tablets on it. A store or a bar would have them setting on the counter and would sell them to the customers, as they needed them. And I would buy them for, like, 50 cents; I'd sell them to the store for a dollar, and they would get a profit of a dollar on them. In other words, everybody doubled their money. The thing is, that worked out real good. It didn't take me so long to get my quota for the day as it would going house-to-house with these Chinese Horn Nuts; but the thing is I was limited to the number of places I could peddle them in every town. I remember Zack Terrell's home town, was it Owensboro, Kentucky . . . anyway, that was one of my big days, I made \$17 there, clear. Chester Bobo Barnett--did you ever know him? Everytime he would see me he would kid me about it. He'd say, "Remember Owensboro?" I would say, "How could I forget it?" You know, nobody on the show was peddling. I was the only peddler. He used to kid me about it.

I think the first year I just had aspirin tablets, then cigarette lighters were just starting to come into style, and the same people that put out the aspirin tablets put out these cards with two flints and a wick, I think, for your cigarette lighter. You know, as you

would use up the ones that originally came with it. It was just about the same deal, I paid 50 cents for it, sold it to them for a dollar and they sold them for two dollars. So I had two things to peddle then, I wasn't limited to speakeasys and bars. There were other stores that would also be interested in that. So that went on, I did that on the Floto Show.

Brown: How many years did you do that?

Barron: Oh, all the time from then on. As long as I was in the circus business I peddled. Then when I went on the Ringling show I did the same thing. I had aspirin tablets and the cigarette lighter flints and wicks. Also I had another sideline on the Ringling show, because my trunk was right next to Herman Joseph's, and Herman sold cigars and candy bars and gum, and so on; he carried them in a trunk and sold them.

Herman Joseph's sideline was selling cigars.

Brown: I wondered why you left the Robinson show?

Barron: The usual thing that happened at the end of the season. A week or so before the show closed they would send contracts back to the dressing room to the people that they wanted to re-hire for the next season. I was one of the ones they sent a contract back and it was for the same amount of money, \$20 a week. I figured that was not a

good deal. If I can't get ahead and get more money now that I had more experience and getting better things all the time to work with, so I sent the contract back. Then, let's see, this was in the fall and a group of us went with this R. M. Harvey's London Hippodrome Indoor Circus, that was a colossal failure, but Jess Adkins was the manager of it.

Brown: Where did you play?

Barron: After the John Robinson show closed, Slivers Johnson, three midgets and Joe Wild and myself, we went to Chicago and worked vaudeville in and around Chicago. You know there were dozens of theaters that would have vaudeville, especially on weekends. So we lived in a small rooming house-hotel like thing, on North Clark Street, right up in the area where the St. Valentine's mas-



sacre occurred, that was the theatrical area. There were performers from the tent shows, the circuses and carnivals, they all spent the winter--if they wintered in Chicago or in that area. In the meantime, we, as a troupe, had signed with R. M. Harvey Winter Circus that was to open in Memphis, Tennessee right after New Year's.

Brown: Who was in the troupe? You mean they were all clowns?

Barron: They were all clowns, there was Slivers Johnson, Joe Wild, myself, and three midgets--dwarfs, you know, the Simmons brothers from Houston, Texas and another dwarf whose name I can't remember right now. So, anyway, we all wandered on our own down to Memphis, because that's where we're going to open. We were getting kind of short of funds because we had been in Chicago and working now and then weekends in vaudeville, and so we arrived in Memphis right after Christmas.

The Simmons brothers knew about selling New Year's noisemakers and hats, and so on, from experience they had had in Houston, so we went to a wholesale house and bought a bunch of noisemakers, horns, and so on, and we peddled them for New Year's to make some extra money. So then the show opened, we had rehearsals in one of the ballrooms in one of the theaters, because this was a new building that wasn't quite completed. We were there for a week or ten days. Business was terrible, but the show was just one of those gigantic things that never should have happened. There were so many acts that they could hardly work. Like, instead of three perch acts they would have five, and instead of three riding acts they would have four riding acts, and the thing is, this R. M. Harvey was a very famous and very good advance man, but he knew nothing about running a circus; but he got some money and started this thing. So we didn't get paid. We were supposed to get paid at the end of the week.

We went to St. Louis and the same

thing happened, business was bad and we didn't get paid. We went to St. Joe, Missouri, the third stop. Business was bad and we didn't get paid and the show closed. So then, that's not far from Kansas City, so some of us went to Kansas City and got jobs working in restaurants, washing dishes, and so on, so we could get our food. But I really had a great time, because there were about four or five vaudeville theaters in Kansas City, including the No. 1, The Orpheum Theater, with two a day vaudeville, and the others with movies and vaudeville. The Pantages circuit was there.

In the meantime, Jess Adkins got in touch with some of us that he wanted us to be with a show that he was re-organizing. I remember that I got a letter from him and he wanted me to come join the new show, and I wrote him back saying that I didn't have any money, that he'd have to send me ten dollars so I could pay the train fare to where the thing was going to open. It opened in Des Moines and we had about ten weeks of successful business, and it worked out good. In the meantime, Jess Adkins was going to be manager of the Gentry show, this would be for the spring of 1927, so I told him I would have to have \$30 a week. He didn't know, he said he would pay me \$25; I said that I had to have \$30 or I was going to go home. Anyway, I went home.

The Gentry show opened and about two weeks later I got a telegram from him saying he would split the difference, that he would give me \$27.50. So I joined the show.

Brown: Of course that was something in those days.

Barron: My idea was that if I couldn't get more money and improve my standing, I was going to get out of the business, that's all. It had that glamour that appealed to me. It was something that I wanted to do, but, on the other hand, I wanted some financial rewards, too. So that was one of the most enjoy-

Gentry Bros. Circus on a lot in Canada in 1927.

able seasons I ever had. We went into Canada, into Sarnia. I joined the show down in Ohio. This was Gentry, a nine or ten car show.

Brown: Who was running this, now?

Barron: The King brothers owned it. They had two shows, Walter L. Main, one of the Kings was the manager of that show, and Jess Adkins was the manager of the Gentry show. So we went into Sarnia, Canada, and we played a lot in Ontario, then we went up to the end of the railroad, up to Timmins and Cobo. We came down and went across the top of Lake Superior near Duluth. We stayed in Canada for a month.

Brown: On the Gentry show you came through Canada and up to Winnipeg?

Barron: We played Winnipeg, and then we played all the towns of any size, and then in Winnipeg--is that where La Pas is--okay, then we went way to the end of the railroad up there, and about the only thing in town was the Hudson Bay Trading Post. There were Indians camped down there waiting for us to come to go to the show. Apparently they hadn't had a circus for a long, long time.

Brown: If ever. Were the crowds good?

Barron: Yes, business was fine. It was one of those shows where everybody got along. There was no petty jealousy or anything, and we had a really good performance. We had the Pinky Hollis' riding act.

Brown: What did they do about the drift, way up in the north there?

Barron: We had no trouble at all. In other words, they had good fixers.

Brown: The mounted police were in there.

Barron: Oh, yes, we'd see them quite often, but I don't know whether they got paid off or what the story was, but I don't know of one day when the drift wasn't working, and we had everything, you know--the shell game, the 3-card Monte, the connection, the cooch in the side show, we had the works. But we gave the public a real good performance. We had a good



band, Henry Kerns, I believe, was the name of the guy who led the band, and his great big, fat wife, she played a tuba or a big horn of some kind. We had Pinky Hollis' riding act. We had Ernie White and his wife who did a perch act. He also did a very good aerial act, head balancing trap with the spinning top thing, and we had another perch act that worked. We had Nada Miller, probably the best wire walker of the day, the Bird Millman type. She'd been with Sparks and with other shows. She got with the Gentry Show because her husband was in charge of concessions, and he was making plenty of money there. Anyway, we had maybe ten clowns. We had a clown band in the parade, because we paraded every day, and we had a clown band in the show, then we did a couple of big clown numbers besides the walkaround. We had barrel kicking, you know those kinds of acts. We had acrobats, and then we had Betty Leonard, she and her husband, Bobby Zenero did a very nice double trap act. She rode manege and I think she worked the elephants, and so on. But, she and Bobby did a double trap act over the center ring, as I recall, and there were two single trap acts, one on either side, working. Then, we had swinging ladders and probably the web act, and we had a lot of clown numbers, and it was a good performance. Well, Henry McFarland was the equestrian director and he worked the liberty act. We had one 12 horse liberty act, and then we had the different girls rode manege, that type of thing. Then at the finish....

Brown: A wild west concert?

Barron: You know, we must have had a concert, but I can't remember cowboys or Indians with the show; anyhow, that part of it is blank.

Brown: You had 15 cars, was it?

Barron: Oh, no, it was a 10 car show. I don't know how they got so much on the train, and it was really only nine cars back, you see; there was always one advance car ahead.

Brown: No gilley wagons?

Barron: Oh, no. We had some good parade wagons that Floyd King had bought from the Ringling show, some of those wagons are at Baraboo now that I'm sure were with that show at that time. So then we played all the towns of any size in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, but we didn't play British Columbia. We came back into the United States in Montana, at the western edge of it, almost, and this was in September; we'd



Inside the Gentry Bros. Circus big top in 1927.

been three months in Canada. Then we played Montana, the Dakotas, Wisconsin, then we went across the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and down through Michigan; and wound up the season in Kentucky or Tennessee, I've forgotten. But it was a wonderful season, because I made a good thing with the Chinese Horn Nuts, and I did just as well in Canada as I did here, you know, except in a little town like La-Pas, I don't think I had hardly any customers there because there wasn't hardly anybody living there to peddle things to.

Brown: The Indians came from probably 50 miles around?

Barron: I can remember one thing, the mosquitoes were terrible. So at the end of that season I went back to Michigan and I worked in Flint that winter in a Neisner 5 & 10 store. Jess Adkins sent me a contract before the season closed for the same amount of money. I sent it back. I didn't hear anything from him, so then I started writing the other shows, the Corporation shows. Well, I didn't want to go on the Hagenbeck & Wallace show, I knew a lot of people over there, and that was kind of a cliquey show, and I had worked with some of the people on this London Hippodrome show, they were good, fine people. Of course I couldn't go back to John Robinson for the same amount of money, and I didn't figure that I was quite ready for the Floto Show. That was my aim, but I thought I would work on Jess Adkins. We corresponded a couple of times during the winter and finally he sent me a contract for \$32.50, five dollars more; plus the fact that I was going to have a single berth. I had a single berth the first year, but I specified that in the contract the second year. I was lucky the first year. Anyway, so then I went back and that season we had about the same people but we played only in the United States.

Brown: This was still Gentry?

Barron: Yes, this was still Gentry,

Jess Adkins was still manager, still owned by the King brothers. We got paid off every week; had a wonderful cookhouse.

Brown: And this was the time that the grift was still there.

Barron: Oh, absolutely. They couldn't operate without the grift.

Brown: And sometimes you were worried about getting shot.

Barron: Oh, no. The only time that happened was on the Gollmar Show, where apparently they didn't have good fixers. Besides, we played so much of this hillbilly country, Tennessee and Kentucky, and they were the kind of people who had shotguns. So at the end of the 1928 season I went back to Flint again and worked in the store. In the meantime, I had built some bigger props and I had a letterhead then, and had been practicing and taking more lessons on the clarinet, and so I was qualified for the band if I needed it.

So I wrote the Floto show and asked for \$50 a week. Well, of course, they had no past history about what I'd been getting, and I listed all the walkarounds I had, spotless clean wardrobe, and all the other nice things, on this nice letterhead I had. Zack Terrell wrote back and offered me \$40 a week. I wrote back and said I would split the difference and work for \$45. It was a lot better than I was getting on Gentry. So I got a contract for \$45, and I joined the show in Chicago. We had to be there. They didn't rehearse much, maybe three or four days before we opened in the Coliseum. Then we were there for about a month, then went under canvas. We opened in Kokomo, or one of those towns down in Indiana or maybe St. Louis, I've forgotten where it was. Anyhow, we heard that Mix was going to join the show.

Brown: How many cars were there when you started the season?

Barron: There were 30 cars, it was the biggest of the Corporation shows. Robinson had 25, I think the Hagenbeck show might have had 25, but not any more. The Floto show was their No. 1 show, we had 30 cars. I had a single berth. I had no problems that way. By that time I had gotten into the position where I could specify that on the contract. So we went along and pulled into Boston about the first of June. On a Saturday we played somewhere near Boston, and Sunday morning we arrived at Andrews Square where the lot was. There were already the ten additional cars there, the two

middle pieces for the big top and the stages, so we opened with a six pole top, three rings, two stages, and Tom Mix. We were in Boston for about a week and did nothing but business. Tom Mix's name was magical, you know, like one of these big rock stars would be, only more so, because he appealed not only to the kids but the grownups, too. Then we had to have additional things to fill up some of the stages, and one of the things was Otto Griebling was with the show--he had started clowning then--and the clown boxing thing was getting to be popular then.

Brown: Sure, with Freddie Freeman.

Barron: Well, before Freddie, oh, he was on the John Robinson show working in Reno McCree's riding act; he hadn't started clowning. He was still working in different riding acts, and he was a pretty good bareback rider. Anyway, so Fred Ledgett, the equestrian director, came to us and he picked me and Otto to be the boxers on one stage, and Bumpsy Anthony was the referee. On the other stage was Jimmy Davison and Chester Barnett, or somebody, so we had two boxing numbers going on at the same time. That was an extra thing, and they had a few extra acts, not many. You see Mix brought in John Agee with his horses and you've seen those barrels on the train, well, that was one of the acts that Mix worked. We had a strong show to begin with and we had Mabel Ward, who did a Leitzel type of act; and three flying acts. We had Poodles Hanneford, and ground bar acts. We had three 12-horse liberty acts, and all the manege and races at the end, the Roman standing races, two horses with men on them and one with a girl, and she would always win, you know, after they had gone around the track three or four times. We didn't have any chariots on that show, the only show I was with that had chariots was John Robinson. So that show went on, and we had nothing but business. We had a good cookhouse, good accommodations on the train, it was really a very enjoyable season.

Brown: You were saying earlier that Tom Mix had a stand-in. Did he have one at that time, in case he didn't make it?

Barron: A stand-in?

Brown: Somebody else who went on if he was too drunk to work.

Barron: No, I don't ever remember him being too drunk to work.

Brown: Sorry, I guess I misunderstood.

Barron: Another great act we had was Pallenberg's Bears. They had been on the Ringling show. They did

roller skating and high bicycle riding, and all that. We had Slats Beeson, a terrific wire act. Have you ever heard of him? He was a female impersonator, but he wasn't feminine acting at all, in fact, he was captain of the baseball team. A terrific guy, he was really funny. He had been with the Ringling show and years before that I think he was with the Floto show. On the Ringling show he was featured in center ring for about five or six years, before Con Colleano came. Then when Con Colleano came, the Corporation hired Slats for the Floto show. We had one great act after another. We had great teeterboard acts, it was just a super show, really. And they deserved to do the business, and they did it.

Brown: What did Mix do in the after-show?

Barron: Not very much. All he did in the main show was, after about a third of the show, they announced him and he came in riding on his horse Tony, and just rode around the whole hippodrome track. The horse, instead of walking straight ahead was high stepping like, you know, all around the ring. Mix, of course, made a terrific appearance, and the people just went Ga-ga.

Brown: They didn't have an intermission, but the wild west show would ride in and around the track.

Barron: Oh, yes, they did at least two wild west announcements and start selling tickets for the concert. Anyway, later on in the show, Mix came in with Johnny Agee's horses and did this act with the barrels, and all he did was just

Tom Mix and Johnny Agee on Sells-Floto Circus.



present the act because Agee had trained the horses. So then in the concert, I remember they had this big disk supported above the center ring and he did sharpshooting and things. Instead of bullets, I think they used small shotgun shells. And maybe Mix announced some of the numbers, or something like that, but as I recall he didn't do much of anything.

Brown: Did he sign autographs after the show?

Barron: No, no, I'm sure he didn't do that. That would have been too much, because that would have been too many to sign. But the public was satisfied with what he did, the fact that they saw him close up instead of in the movies.

Anyway, John Ringling bought the Corporation shows. I recall we were in Dallas, Texas when we got word that Ringling bought the shows, in September. Then the stock market crashed in October, and they closed [most of] the Corporation shows [over the next few years]. We closed fairly early, and we were surprised because the business the show was doing, why they closed this early. We thought maybe we'd get an extra month out of the thing.

Brown: And Mix was still with them?

Barron: Oh, sure. So then a bunch of people who lived in the south, left the show. I think we closed in Paducah, Kentucky, because I remember the Sunday in Paducah--in fact there's a write up in one of the first *White Tops* about the banquet that we had and Slats Beeson was the Master of Ceremonies and it listed all of us who were at this banquet, in this little paper one-sheet thing that the *White Tops* put out at that time. That would be 1929, and it would be like October-November.

Brown: I'll photostat it to you.

Barron: Have you ever hear of Dime Wilson?

Brown: Sure, sure, the table rock act.

Barron: Well, his mother and father were on the show and Dime was only about 14 at the time. Dime and his father both clowned, they'd come off of some small show.

Brown: The mom did a nice iron jaw.

Barron: Yes, she had a great appearance, great iron jaw act. She rode manege, did swinging ladders. As the season went on, Dime's father, Gil was telling me about this friend of his, an old time pony and horse trainer by the name of York. So, anyway, he talked to me about the thing, and I agreed to go with the Wilsons to Iowa

for this rag bag mud show. This was the end of the 1929 season, after the crash. Of course, the Floto show had closed, we rode the show train back to Peru, then we went to Chicago and took a train to Keystone, Iowa, a little town in the eastern third of Iowa. There the show was stranded. They had just one hotel in town and the hotel was the front part of the Opera House. I remember going up the stairs--there were rooms along the front of it--and where you walked along to your room you looked out and that was the balcony for the Opera House.

The only animals with the York show were dogs and ponies. The beat up equipment included a 30 foot round top with one middle piece. We looked it over and thought this was going to be pretty bad. I took the train to Des Moines and talked to this automobile guy and we signed an agreement that we would take it [the show] over. So then the Wilsons and myself, we went ahead three towns and booked the show. Then we got paper and set the thing up (in those days you could get paper done real quick--stock stuff, you know) and we called it Lindy Bros. Circus because Lindbergh was popular that season. We had no band. We did the whole show with just the four of us; well, six including York. His wife did sort of a Dance of the Seven Veils. She was about 80 years old, you see. The next town we went to, I think, was Belle Plaine, maybe 15 miles away, and we just barely got there what with the trucks steaming and overheating. The lot was the school playground and we hired the school band. That was to be our music for the show. We figured we would just do night shows. We got the top up and did a little business. We sold tickets, went in and did the show, then we moved on to the next town. In the meantime we were going ahead and billing one or two towns the next day, and we were trying to get out of Iowa because it was getting cold. This was late November then.

Brown: Were you sleeping in the trucks?

Barron: Oh, yes. And under the trucks. But we thought we're going to get this thing to Texas and we're going to have a gold mine.

Brown: No cookhouse?

Barron: The Wilsons had a tent and that was their sleeping quarters and dining room. This went on for about a week and it was just getting impossible to move the thing. So then we took everything back to the fairgrounds in Des Moines, because we were still in Iowa, and we left it there.



Tom Mix and Zack Terrell on Sells-Floto in 1930.

I went in and saw the guy and told him it was just impossible, we just couldn't do it, and that was it.

Then the Wilsons and myself started playing theaters as added attractions in Iowa. Since some of the theaters would have talking pictures and some wouldn't, we would go and play weekends, Friday, Saturday and Sunday in a movie theater. The movie theaters were all in opera houses, so they had a stage, and Lil would do the iron jaw, York would have his dogs and ponies, and he had a wonderful pick-out pony, and Lottie, his wife, would do the Dance of the Seven Veils, and Gil Wilson and myself did all talking clown numbers. About every other number would be a talking clown number.

Brown: Those went over well, I'm sure.

Barron: Oh, sure. And those were old, old gags, but these people enjoyed them. So this went on through the Christmas season. At Christmas time we got artificial flowers and peddled them house to house. We were getting along fine. Oh, our headquarters was Oskaloosa, Iowa. We rented like half of a house and we had comfortable living quarters. We had a kitchen, two bedrooms, a living room and that was where our headquarters were. We would take buses or trains out to these different places where we were showing. The Yorks had one old truck that would carry the ponies and the dogs. They lived in another house down the street. Oskaloosa was a fairly good sized town, and they had a beautiful opera house there that wasn't being used

as a movie theater, because there were two or three movie theaters in the town already. So we thought we would put on an indoor show. We talked to the American Legion, and Gil Wilson was a member.

At the close of the Floto season, Zack Terrell sent me a contract for \$45 and I just sent it back. I wasn't going to work for that money another year. We had been around the circus long enough that we knew if this indoor show was going to be successful, we had to have income from advertising, we had to have tickets sold ahead, and so on. Then we hired a guy and his wife that did three acts, maybe juggling, some kind of a hand stand acrobatic act, something like that. Then we hired--I forgot what act--but each act tripled, you know, plus the numbers we did. The American Legion supplied the band for the music in the orchestra pit, and we operated it on weekends, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and every show was a sell out, and we made money and they made money on the promotion.

In the meantime, now Pat Valdo was in charge of hiring acts and performers for all of the Ringling owned shows, so he knew me, because he had visited the Floto show a couple of times after Ringling bought it. I wrote him and said that I would be interested in going on the Ringling show and that I wanted \$60 a week. The depression was on, but I wanted more money. I was young, and if you had some money, you didn't think about it being a depression. It didn't bother me. I had enough money to go to shows and to eat in restaurants, and do what I wanted to do. He wrote back and he offered. . . . lets see, I was getting \$45 the first year with the Floto show. . . . and Valdo said he couldn't give me any more money, things were not that great. So I didn't hear anything, then about a month before the show opened I got another letter from him and he offered me \$50 a week--so I took it. So then I went back to the Floto show in 1930 for \$50 a week.

We had Tom Mix on the show, and pretty much the same show we had before, as I recall, but now it was cut back to a 30 car show. We just had three rings, then, no stages.

Brown: The first year it was 30, then went up to 40?

Barron: The first year was 30, then it went up to 40 when Mix joined the show. The second year, I'm sure they cut it back to 30 cars, because I don't remember two stages. Well, with Mix there the show still did great business, but nothing like the first year because people were beginning to feel the de-

pression. We closed early, maybe the first week in October. The usual thing with the Corporation shows in those years, you'd run it until about Thanksgiving time, close to the first of December.

Brown: How did things go? Did you have a single berth finally?

Barron: Oh, yes. After the John Robinson show, I always had a single berth.

Brown: Did you have your own act? You did the clown boxing still?

Barron: Oh, no. Only did the clown boxing with Otto in 1929, when they had the stages. They didn't have the clown boxing in 1930.

Brown: Did you do your contortion act?

Barron: Oh, no. I hadn't done any contortion since John Robinson, just clowning. But then I was getting bigger props and bigger walkarounds. A lot of things that were timely, you could use them this year and next year they were passe, you know. I spent a lot of money on wardrobe, and then I had learned to build a lot of props myself. I got acquainted with a guy in Chicago who built props for vaudeville and burlesque performers. Anyway, the Floto show was practically the same show. We had a few different people. I was, of course, peddling my aspirin tablets and cigarette lighter flints and wicks.

Brown: You met your German friend, the man with the dies and all for the chocolate. Didn't you tell me about the chocolate business then?

Barron: No, no. One thing I forgot was I got a lot of indoor dates that winter with Orrin Davenport. Anyway, then I wrote Pat Valdo . . . oh, he promised me when he gave me the raise for the 1930 season, that the next year he would put me on the Ringling show. That was part of our so-called verbal deal. This was to get me to sign up for \$50 a week in 1930. I think I was the only person on the show that got a raise that year. So many of them were . . . you see, I was sort of independent, and I had started this deal of improving myself and getting more money each year, and I worked on it. Plus the fact that I tried to give them value received. So then Pat would write me at these different indoor shows and would talk about coming back, and so on, for \$50 a week. No, I wouldn't do it.

Finally I agreed to play the Coliseum engagement only for the Floto show in 1931, and instead of the regu-



Tom Mix surrounded by Sells-Floto clowns. Tom Barron is the tall one in the back row.

lar salary, I was to get \$85 a week, but I had all these new gags that I had promised I would build and have on the show. But at the end of the Coliseum engagement, we decided what my salary was going to be with the Ringling show, that I was going to join as soon as the Floto show left the Coliseum. He, of course, was there off and on during the Chicago engagement. Finally, when he saw the things I had and the things he wanted to be on the Ringling show, I said I had to have \$75 a week, and I was getting \$85 for the Coliseum engagement, but I said for \$10 less because I was going to get room and board. At the Coliseum you had to pay your own. Finally he gave me \$60 a week on the Ringling show, and that was more than a lot of them were getting, but I had all these good gags and everything, see?

At the end of the 1931 season, they sent a contract and I sent it back and said, "No." I didn't realize the depression was on, really. I was making money and had an income all the time from all the stuff I was peddling. Anyway, on the Ringling show, it was another thing. When I joined the show, they were in Philadelphia, right after they had left Madison Square Garden, so they put my trunk in really a good spot. I don't know why, I was lucky that way, in the third aisle, right next to Herman Joseph. Next to Herman was Butch Landorf. In back of my trunk was Louie Moeser, who was the mailman and also a tall skinny clown who walked around the track and a mule would come behind him and pick him up, you know that gag? He didn't do very much, but he was primarily the mailman. And Albert Powell, his trunk was next to his. Herman had this sideline of selling cigars and cigarettes and candy bars. Well, Herman had trouble trying to get his things, because he had

to be on the lot so much. After a few days when we got acquainted, he found out that I was peddling stuff and would be downtown or around where wholesale places would be, so then he hired me to be like his pick-up man, and I would go and do my peddling in the morning and would visit one of these wholesale places and buy cigars, cigarettes and candy bars and bring them back for him to sell to the show. At first he thought I was going to be his competition,

because I was going to sell them, too. Well, that would have been suicide; he'd been with the show for years and people knew and liked him. He was a hell of a nice guy. And I remember one thing about that. When we got into Chicago I went to this wholesale house and the guy told me he had something new in a candy bar that I should have, and it was the Mars bar. They had been making Milky Way bars and that were covered with milk chocolate. The Mars bar was covered with dark chocolate. So I brought them back to Herman and he was one of the first to sell Mars bars on the Ringling show.

Brown: I'll bet he liked that.

Barron: About a week or so before the show got into Chicago, we were playing towns in Michigan. The hotels were desperate for business. There were probably a half dozen or more hotels in Chicago that sent people onto the show to book us for the engagement, because we were there for about ten days. They knew we were not going to live on the train, we were going to stay in hotels. I had gotten acquainted with Jerry Bangs. After the show at night we would go downtown and have something to eat, then go back to the train. In hot weather we never got onto the train. The heat was just unbelievable. So we signed up for the Knickerbocker, and the Knickerbocker was, I think, up on the Gold Coast, across from the Drake, and was a high class hotel, just a step below the Drake. After the show at night, we would walk up to Michigan Avenue and get the bus and go up to the Knickerbocker. Well, plus the fact that in the morning we could go swimming, we were right there on Lake Michigan. The water was cold, but it wasn't that bad, and we didn't have to be on the lot until matinee time. In a town like Chicago it was pretty hard for me to operate my sideline. In a great big city, that wasn't good, I needed medium size or small cities, places where

I could visit. So I didn't sell aspirin tablets in Chicago. But, we had this terrific rainstorm, like between the matinee and the night show, and the lot just turned into a sea of mud. We always had boots and raincoats in our trunks on the lot, and boots and raincoats on the train, in case of bad weather. So we put on our boots and raincoats after the show and plowed through all this mud, got on the bus and rode up Michigan Avenue and traipsed into the lobby of the Knickerbocker with all the muddy boots and everything. Nobody said anything. What could they say? They knew the weather was bad; they knew we were with the circus.

Brown: Did the manager say, "Take off your boots?"

Barron: So that season, this was 1931, and we had all those big name performers. We had Con Colleano, and Dorothy Herbert riding sidesaddle over the flaming jumps. And the show that year had the white statue act, you know, the white horses, dogs and the men and women all in white and they lowered these big velvet curtains. Did you ever see them do that?

Brown: Yes, on Al G. Barnes they used to do that.

Barron: They had these enormous big velvet curtains that just pulled up to the big top, and they would lower them and they would change their positions, and so on.

Brown: On Barnes, did the platforms also revolve?

Barron: They had some guy underneath cranking them.

Brown: Clyde Beatty was there, wasn't he, in Madison Square Garden?

Barron: He was in Madison Square Garden, but on the road he went back with Hagenbeck show. We had no cat act that year on the road. In fact, we had no cat act either of the two years I was there, in 1931 and 1932, except they had them in the buildings. We also had Alfredo Codona.

Brown: Leitzel was dead then.

Barron: Yes, she had died the winter before, I think it was.

Brown: Codona was flying really high and recklessly?

Barron: Well, yeah, but he was just one of these . . . I've never seen a flyer that had the class and style that he had, he was like a ballet performer in the air. These others are, I think, the Gaonas are great, but he is bigger and heavier, and doesn't have that . . . and he's great in the way that he bounces back up from the net to the catch bar. We had three rings and four stages on the show then. The stages on the end were small and they didn't use them all the time. The rest of the time the

stages and the rings were full all the time. Then we had the big clown firehouse number, that was the big number. We had maybe about ten trucks. We had about fifteen dwarfs on the show, maybe one or two that were midgets.

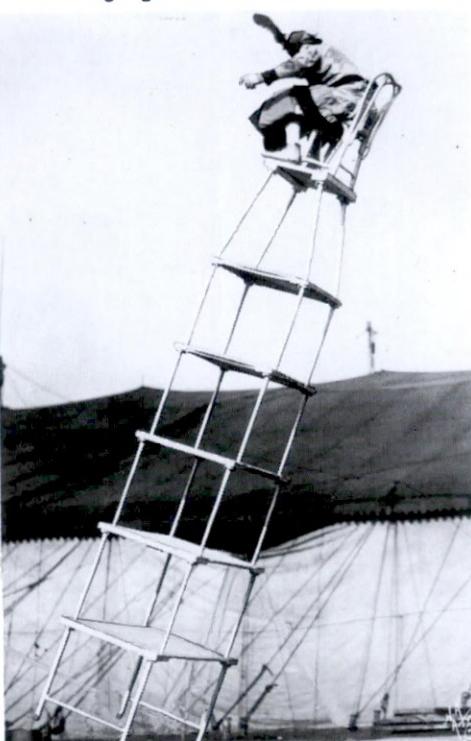
Harry Rittley did a table rock. He probably did the best and the highest table rocking of anybody. In fact, he did that in center ring, and at the end of the table rock, he, when he fell over, Chesty, the clown, was sitting on the ring curb, like reading a paper, and he got up and ran with the paper and threw it into the house, and that's when the house caught on fire. That started the firehouse number

We had the Wallendas. They had been with them a couple of years. We had super acrobatic acts, and perch acts, and in those days they didn't have cradle acts. The aerial acts were two people, a man and a woman, doing a double trap act, and the best ones were on the Ringling show. We also had the guy from Texas who was a terrific head balancing trap act.

Brown: Did Bradna's wife have the dogs?

Barron: The Act Beautiful, the dogs running on top of the wheels and in the wheels, and so on; and the pigeons. Oh, the funny thing about that, I'll tell you later. This Paul Horompo, a perfect midget, would come out and he would shoot and the box up above would open up and the pigeons would all fly out,

Harry Rittley doing his table rock while with Ringling-Barnum.



and they would be all different colors. They'd fly around and come in and land on the cart and on her arms. That was an important thing in the show, her Act Beautiful. Of course, Bradna was the equestrian director.

Brown: I have the Ringling program for that year.

Barron: But I won't be in it because I opened later in Chicago and the program was already printed. I remember we closed in Atlanta, Georgia, and business wasn't that great. A friend I had gone to high school with in my hometown of Howell, Michigan, his father, all the time I was growing up and going to high school, had this popcorn wagon and sold hot dogs on the main four corners of the town. That was a common thing. He was one of my best friends when I was going to high school, and at the end of the 1931 season, I was mad at the Ringling show because they closed so early, and all of a sudden there was no more money coming in.

In the meantime, that year as we were going through the middle west, there was a fad starting called Caramel Corn. As I found out, the idea originated around Denver and was working east. I found out I could buy the equipment in Cincinnati, so I took the train from Atlanta to Cincinnati and I bought a popcorn machine and all the equipment, and had that shipped to my hometown in Michigan. When I got back, I went to see this friend, Kenny Henderson, who was working as a bookkeeper for an oil company, and he wasn't getting very much money and he wasn't very happy. I told him about the Caramel Corn and he had heard about it, but there were still no caramel corn shops in Michigan. He said he would quit and we would go in partnership on this. So we went to East Lansing, Michigan and there were lots of vacant stores, and we rented a store right across from Michigan State University, which at that time was called Michigan Agricultural College and not that big a school.

We rented the store, got stuff all ready, put a fan in the window so as we were making the caramel corn the aroma would go out into the street. I can remember the Mills brothers were very popular then, their records, and I can remember that music, and we had the place partitioned off and had two army cots in the back where we slept. We had a shower and toilet that went with the store. And we did nothing but business—it was just unbelievable because it was new and people just couldn't get enough of it.

This went on until, maybe, January.

We were there three months and did a whale of a business and, for those days, made a very good amount of money for ourselves. Then business started falling off, and Pat Valdo had written me about the show. When the popcorn business was good, I really wasn't interested in going back to the show, but when business started falling off, I thought I had better see what I could do. We dickered back and forth. I said I had to have more money, and he said that was ridiculous, that they were, in fact, thinking about cutting salaries.

I finally, about a week before the show opened, signed the contract to go back for the same money I had gotten in 1931, which was really good for the conditions. I did not have hardly anything new in props. I think I had only one prop that I had built for the winter shows the year before, that I hadn't used on the road.

I went to Chicago and spent a week with this friend of mine in this prop house, building three new props for the Ringling show for walkaround; and I got some new wardrobe. Then I went to New York, because in those days you didn't go to Sarasota to rehearse. The rehearsing was done in Madison Square Garden. That was the year we had the Ubangis, then basically the show was about the same. They had changed the spec. So we played New York, the usual month or so in Madison Square Garden; then went to Boston for a week or so, and I think that year we opened under canvas in Brooklyn.

Brown: That was the year they had Goliath?

Barron: Oh, no. They had Goliath before in 1931. In 1932 their so called "attraction" was the Ubangis. They were crazy. They didn't want to wear any clothes. You see, and they had this Frenchman who was sort of their "chief." He made the deal and brought them over. He had a hell of a time trying to control them, and making sure when they paraded them around the hippodrome track . . . every once in a while they'd take all their clothes off. Of course Pat Valdo and Bradna would go crazy. They finally simmered down and they realized what they should do. I can't remember anything much different that happened during that season. I was peddling my aspirin tablets, and Jerry Bangs was still there. Herman Joseph and all of them were there. Tommy and Everett Hart, they had a guy work-

ing for him they called The Hart Trio, they did a very nice acrobatic act, and they were very good clowns, good walkarounds.

There were about five of us that would go out every night. The advantage of the show in those days was, we went in spec, came out, rushed to put our make up on and then do our first walkaround. They would do the riding stock for the principal riding act, and then we would do walkarounds and then the fire number, and the last number they called "the crazy number."

We would wash up and take our make up off and put on some kind of a big head to camouflage ourselves. That year I had a bend-over gorilla thing. I had the sheet in the back and some kind of a mask on, and the guy that worked with me would take the sheet and flip it and I'd bend over; and with my contortion thing, which I was still able to do, I could jump around and up and down. And I had a good gorilla costume that this place in Chicago had built for me. It was one of those bend over things. Felix Adler worked with Jack LeClair, who was a very funny clown, and they had a bend over pony-horse like, so we had these two bend overs in the "crazy number." We did the "crazy number" while they were putting up the nets for the flying acts. We had three flying acts. Most of the time, the clown walkarounds were just time consuming distractions for the public while they were getting ready for some other kind of an act where they had to set up a lot of props. But the minute we got out of there and took the costumes off, we could leave the lot. I would stay there night after night at the back door

Two of the Ubangi women who appeared with Ringling-Barnum in 1932.



and peek through and watch Codona because he worked right in front of the back door. It was just such a great act.

Then we would rush and get on the streetcar or the bus before the public got out there, so we could get downtown. Very seldom, in a show the size of the Ringling show, was the lot anywhere near the trains. They were a long way away, especially our fourth section. The sections for loading the wagons and all that would be as near the lot as possible; but they didn't care where they stuck our cars.

Ira Milette was the guy who did this great head balancing trap act, and then he ran a crap game, always outside of the train, because it was hot and we wouldn't go to bed until the train started to move, and I wasn't a gambler by any means, but every once in a while I would bet that the number would come up, or wouldn't come up, and then we'd just sit around and talk. Once the train started to move, we'd run and jump on it and then go to bed.

In the meantime, we had stored this caramel corn, popcorn, equipment, and Kenny went back to work for this oil company. And at the end of that season I could see the handwriting on the wall, because they were closing up the Corporation shows. They were going to close the Floto show. I think mainly because John Ringling hated the Floto show, because he got in all this trouble because he bought it because of the business they were doing.

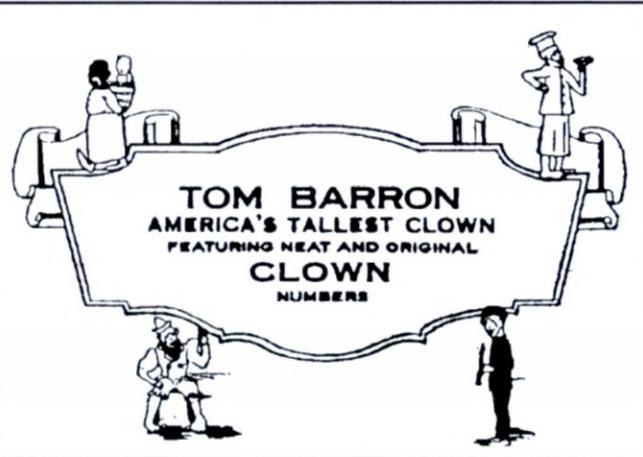
I went back home and we got this equipment, loaded it on an old Ford that Kenny had, and we drove east because the caramel corn thing was working east. We were going to open up again, but we had to be ahead of it. So we went through New York state. I remember we were snowbound in one town for two or three days, and we finally got to Schenectady.

There was a pretty good store there, the location was good, and we were going to rent that, then we decided we'd go over to Massachusetts where better possibilities were. So we drove around, and most of the towns at that time, I knew something about them because I had played them with the circus. I was familiar with the main streets and the downtown area, and so on. We would go to these towns and if there was a caramel corn store there, we would leave and go some place else.

Finally we wound up in Framingham. We had a good location, the rent was very reasonable, and so we opened up. In the meantime, Kenny was engaged to this

girl back home and he didn't last very long. Finally he said he couldn't stay there, he had to go home, back to Michigan. I said I would do the business. We had been open for only a week or two and business was great. I said if it continues on I would pay him for his half of the equipment, otherwise I would ship it back to Michigan when I closed up. The depression was really on then, you see; things were really bad.

So then, a fellow who had a candy store in Waltham, nearby, was looking for extra business and he heard I had a caramel corn shop. He took the bus over and brought over a certain kind of molasses candy he made to try to sell it to me, wholesale it. I said I would try it, so I put that in, and later he came over with something else. I went over and saw his store, he had a complete candy store, where he made his chocolate and everything. Because the caramel corn and popcorn business was going down all the time I had saturated the market, as it were, and in those days theaters didn't sell popcorn, so I would sell popcorn to the people before they



Letterhead used by Tom Barron in 1930. It is printed in red and blue.

went to the movies, and I was right near one of the theaters then. I finally made a deal with him where he would come over one day a week to make candy in my place, and teach me how to make candy. So that's how I got involved in the candy business.

Brown: And this was the fellow who had the special molds and all that you told me about? Valentines and Christmas and all? Was that the same guy?

Barron: Yes. He'd been in the candy business for about ten years. He had worked for another company and then started this store of his own in Waltham. He'd been there for maybe a couple of years, but he needed extra income because the depression was on and his business was not that great. So it was one of those things that worked out to his advantage and my advantage. Then I got acquainted with other people in the candy business and then started going to meetings and conventions, and would exchange ideas, and so on. That's how the business developed.

In the meantime, I would visit the shows, the Ringling show or the Hagenbeck show. Then the Cole show came along with Jess Adkins, and I'd visit those shows and the guys would say, "When are you coming back? You can't get out of show business, you've got sawdust in your veins." Well, it was really tough for a couple of years, but then I was just stubborn enough I wasn't going to go back for less money and I never did.



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Mr. and Mrs. Claude Webb had operated the Russell Bros. truck circus for the better part of three decades before Arthur Concello bought the circus early in the 1943 season. Concello later stated that he had covered the purchase price by the time the show hit Washington State a few months after opening.

Concello hired Clyde Beatty as the feature act and his name was appended to the title for a very lucrative 1944 tour.

In 1945, following the death of Ray Rogers, Beatty bought the Wallace Bros. Circus and Concello moved his show to rails using the Russell Bros. Pan Pacific title. The new Beatty trucker was called Clyde Beatty's All New Trained Wild Animal Circus.

Concello again came to Beatty in the fall of 1945. During meetings at the Houston Shrine Circus the two worked out a deal similar to the one in 1944. Concello owned the show and Beatty received a flat salary and a percentage for presenting his acts and use of his name. In late December of 1945 Beatty advertised the sale of his truck circus. Floyd King bought the show, taking possession on January 15, 1946 in Macon, Georgia.

Beatty had rail show cages built in Eureka, Illinois. These were the only new wagons on the 1946 show. The other wagons used on the Pan Pacific show had come from the Beckmann & Gerety carnival. After a very profitable tour Beatty bought the circus.

Beatty's ownership of a fifteen car railroad circus began in 1947 and would last until 1956. Beatty continued using the carnie wagons for two years. The equipment was upgraded with the purchase of the like-new wagons from the failed 1947 Sparks Cir-

A former semi-trailer turned circus wagon on Beatty in 1946. Pfening Archives.



RECOLLECTIONS of the BEATTY RAILER

By Charles I. Meltzer

cus. The 1949 Beatty season opened using the former Sparks equipment.

During most of the years of the Beatty railer I was a student, growing up in San Diego, California. The zoo was my backyard or playground. Several of the zoo keepers and sea lion trainers were my best pals. Many of these fine animal men were graduates of Sells-Floto, Hagenbeck-Wallace and Al G. Barnes circuses. As these shows folded the men gravitated to zoo work. Friendship with these men was my entree to behind the scenes visits to any circus playing the San Diego area.

Joe Walch, on right, with Alfred Court in 1949. Pfening Archives.

During the lifetime of the Beatty railer it played an extended stand in San Diego prior to its big Los Angeles date early in the spring. All of the equipment was usually freshly painted. The tents, by contrast, were those used the prior year. Over the years several movies were filmed on the show. I understood that on those occasions the paint job, spec and aerial ballet wardrobe was financed by movie income. The new canvas was not used until the

Los Angeles date. The movie work took place during the L. A. stand.

Beatty's featured cat act was usually in rough shape in San Diego, as Beatty's appearances at winter indoor dates had become a thing of the past. So the act often consisted of unrehearsed excitement.

One of my distinct memories is of a workout one morning in the big top. I was shocked to discover a man other than Beatty in the steel arena with several of the cats. To make matters worse he was obviously in a training session. This trainers

whole demeanor was the antithesis of Beatty. He was very quiet and calm. The pole and buggy whip were used like pincers to move a cat and cue it to a seat. What he was doing was repetitive, but not boring.

This was my first introduction to wild animal training. I was told that the trainer was Joe "Cyclone" Walsh, a protege of Alfred Court. Walsh was both brushing up the act and introducing new animals. Most of Beatty's cats were "seat warmers" in the cage to fill it.

There were no guns popping or whips cracking, none of the things that characterized the usual Beatty presentation.

It was explained to me that Beatty

Rebuilding a 1946 Beatty cage in Shreveport, Louisiana in 1948. Pfening Archives.



was the master performer. He was not considered as great shakes as a breaker-trainer. Walsh must have used the same basic pole cues that were used by Beatty and were clearly visible in film footage from the 1930s on.

As a devotee of the press agency, thriller books and movies I had been captivated by the Beatty mystique. His carefully crafted image collapsed in front of my eyes. Beatty was no longer my hero. During the many morning training sessions over the years I don't recall ever seeing the star in attendance. He would have to have seen the new animals working in order to know their peculiarities. Perhaps he saw them after the night performance or after the circus left San Diego.

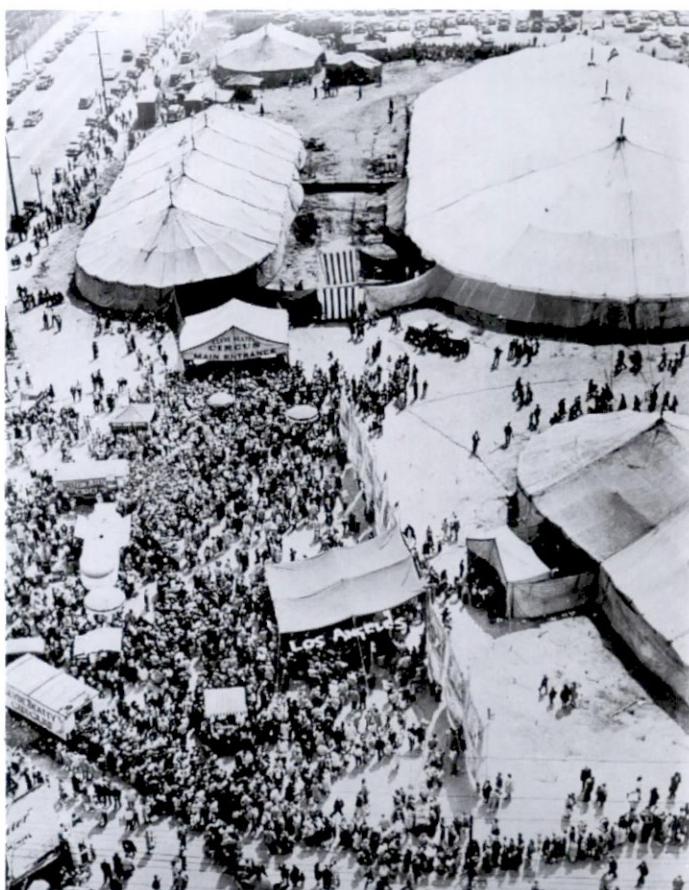
New cats were already seat broken, probably at Thousand Oaks. However they were not used to Beatty's other cats, props and music. New cats would be introduced one at a time to only one or two very quiet animals as company. For the most part this was a slow, patience, time-consuming chore. Fifty years later I am still amazed at the calm and collected methods of an experienced trainer.

The menagerie tent was placed parallel with the big top. Beatty used four large cage wagons for the working cats. Each wagon was divided into five compartments. This allowed him a maximum of twenty animals. I can't recall him having more than seventeen or eighteen cats. Eight or nine large maimed male lions provided the glamour and flash of the act. Three or four of these were run onto their seats quickly. They were what the animal men called "Thousand Oaks Thrillers." These were cats that looked good to the townies. They might have "bob" or

The bandwagon in the Beatty menagerie in 1954. The cat act cages are in background. Pfening Archives.



lions. Beatty's were generally quiet and willing performers, not requiring the pole prodding commonly used on the male lions. Trainers today prefer the larger and better working Bengal Siberia bred.



The Clyde Beatty Circus in Los Angeles in 1948. Pfening Archives.

"screw" tails or crooked spines and hind quarters. They were simply sceneries. The rest of the male lions were good looking and "bounced" or performed tricks in the act. In the earlier years he always had three or four feisty lionesses that provided much of the noisy excitement as they roared and "bounced" at Beatty as they entered the arena. These "girls" were also seat warmers. Later in his career he eliminated the females as they were potentially dangerous.

Most seasons around four tigers filled out the compliment of "jungle bred striped man eaters," in the big act. These were small dark Sumatran animals available at the time. Tigers were expensive and hard to get compared to



The six Beatty cross cages formerly on Sparks. Pfening Archives.

Beatty's male lions were typical of their lot, slow to respond to the extent that they appeared lazy or drugged. However there were always several, probably youngsters, that were more excitable and added greatly to the audience's thrills. These "bouncers" who appeared to be after the "Fearless Beatty" with murder in their hearts were the backbone of his reputation. Their attacks were actually a response to the whip, chair and pole being waved in their faces. Younger animals will respond like an overgrown house cat on such stimulation. It was a form of play response. This doesn't mean that these bounce or play attacks might not occasionally go to far. Many cat trainers will admit that this play response has been the cause of injuries.

Trainers, especially in acts of mixed species, must stop fights or face the prospect of injured or dead animals. Lions, especially females, are gang fighters as this is the way they hunt effectively. Years later Mel Koontz, known as the movie trainer, told me to watch out for lions. He said, "if one gets you down, they all come in for dinner. If a tiger decides to attack it will follow through and will be harder to stop than an individual lion. Tigers don't usually gang fight." Leopards, jaguars and pumas each have their own characteristics. Animal trainers quickly learn, however, that these are only characteristics, not species specific laws.

The four cage wagons that housed the working cats were arranged across the side of the menagerie tent. They were pushed tightly end to end in order to facilitate the running of the an-

imals through the wagons into the chute that led into the steel arena in the big top. There were six cross cage dens from the Sparks show. Typically these small cages housed sun bears cubs, aoudeds, gibbons, parrots, ocelots and common species of monkeys. They were obtained each spring from Louis Goebel's compound in Thousand Oaks. Several camels, llamas and the usual herd of about six elephants completed the traveling zoo stock.

Riding act stock and ponies were picketed around one end of the tent and constituted the advertised horse fair. Saddle horses were kept in the back yard. The cages were nicely painted with simple painted scroll work. The occupants of the cross cages were commonly mislabeled, much to my amusement.

During my many visits to the Beatty menagerie I recall only one occasion when the great showman came into this tent to look over his cats prior to the act. According to his cage boys, the night before there had been a major cat fight during the big act. Several of the cats had some serious looking wounds. Gentian Violet and sulfa powder had been liberally applied to the gashes. He told the cage boys to send them all in to do the act as none of them looked unable to work. That matinee, the elephant- riding tiger was so lame in one hind leg that she could hardly climb, much less jump from the pedestal over to the platform on the elephant's back. The act was curtailed and the show got a roasting from the media on the condition of the cats. The bright purple and yellow of the medications was visible from any seat in the big top. In all the years of circus going I have never seen anything like it. Today a trainer would be jailed for presenting animals in such condition.

Each season I would be disappointed that no chimp, seal or bear act would grace the performance. Beatty had earlier owned two chimps that had been on his truck shows. Albert Fleet had worked them until they had grown so big they were tough to handle. Fleet, performing as Capt. Cramer, had also served as Beatty's chair assistant and understudy for several seasons on the truck circus and was on the first raileder owned by Concello. By the time Beatty owned his own raileder Fleet was gone. That was the reason Joe Walsh and possibly others came on to shape up the big act.



Harriett and Clyde Beatty in 1947. Art Stensvad photo.

The circus had a nice liberty horse act, pony drills and a dog act. For many years in the early part of the performance a single elephant and two ponies were worked as end ring acts. Later in the program the big elephant act was presented in the two end rings. Most years the herd consisted of six or eight elephants, not enough for a full three ring display. The elephants worked very fast and smoothly. However the bull hook was not spared. The act concluded with a walking long mount down the front side of the hippodrome track.

I fancied myself a cage act aficionado. Having seen the likes of Mathis, Stark, Roth, Dhorte, et. al., Beatty's position at the head of my list eventually slipped. However over the years the Beatty raileder provided circus audiences with well balanced shows, with some of the best acts in the business. My favorite was the Hannefords bare back riding act. It was certainly a headliner in any era. They were featured for several seasons and were real crowd pleasers. A big disappointment was the Wallenda high wire act. Due to the relatively low height of the big top, compared to indoor arenas, and the height of the big pyramid, the cable was rigged low and presented with a net. These circumstances eliminated much of the well known Wallenda thrill.

During the early spring the ponies,

llamas and Bactrian camels on the show would look very shaggy and ungroomed. The camels' humps would be floppy, a sign of light winter feeding. Beatty was notorious for poor winter animal care. Reportedly one year there was not enough money in the quarters office to winter the cats. When the show closed early in 1956 an entire liberty horse act was sacrificed horse by horse to keep the cats alive. George "Poppy" Scott had no choice and had to keep the cats alive. Beatty had no knowledge of this as he was away trying to raise money to save the show.

For many years in San Diego the show grounds were on black top at a former aircraft manufacturer's parking lot. This paved area was a distinct advantage during the often rainy early spring date. Mud was never a problem, though flooding ruined the date in 1956.

The big disadvantage was the mildewy conditions that would become quite noticeable after the second day. The show would hose down the worst areas and apply a deodorant-disinfectant to cut down the stink. The highly touted "magic odor" of the one day stand was lost in the accumulated stagnant reek. The deodorant only masked one smell with another. When Ringling would play the same lot in the dry, hot fall of the year, its menagerie was side walled. The worst odors escaped into the atmosphere and their stand was of shorter duration. However after their second day the show could be smelled a block away, and it wasn't the shavings, popcorn and hot dogs.

I remember Beatty's cage boys liked the meat sold to the circus by the zoo. It was fresh, butchered in the zoo's immaculate butcher shop. It was rolled in bone meal and was of a quality not ordinarily obtainable in the years on one day stands. This quality feed greatly simplified the clean up work in the cages, chute and arena. The zoo's slaughter house was cleaner and more carefully supervised than any facility of its kind that I have seen for meat for human consumption. Later in my life, as a zoo keeper, I ate a lot of this meat myself. Zoo pay was not so good.

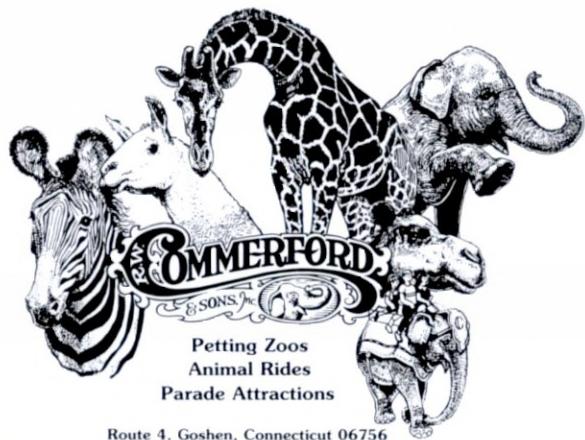
During many of the same years I visited the Beatty show I was privileged to have seen Ringling-Barnum, Cole Bros. and Polack Bros. This may have made me unduly critical of the Beatty circus. Today, looking back, there is very little I wouldn't exchange for a day in the Beatty menagerie!

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In 1973 Floyd King taped this biography of his years in show business for Tom Parkinson. The tapes are now at the Circus World Museum. It was transcribed by Evelyn Riker.

Tom Parkinson has asked me to tell of some of the exciting experiences that I had during the career in which I operated circuses. In 1929, the Cole Bros. ten car circus of which I was the owner emerged from its winter quarters at the fairgrounds in Alexandria, Louisiana, for its tour. When the show arrived in Princeton, Kentucky, the opening stand, a problem was discovered in the light plant. It seemed when the circus went into winter quarters, a tap was removed from the bottom of the electric light plant to drain the engine tank. It was placed on a shelf and somehow during the winter, it was lost. Our boss mechanic, who was very capable, had left us and he was replaced by a new man, who came to me early in the spring and told me that the tap was out and he would have to have an aluminum tap made to fit the opening; which he did.

Everything moved along nicely in the opening stand at Princeton, Kentucky; however, the next morning early, they told me that as they were getting ready to pack up the light plant and cut it off, the jolting of the engine had loosened the tap under the oil tank and all of the oil poured out. The motor ran for some time with no oil and was torn up considerably. The next morning, when I found out all this, I got a list of the parts that were needed and I wired ahead to Buffalo, New York where these Buffalo engines were made. They made thousands for the government during the war, and this was one we had purchased in Mt. Sterling, Kentucky from a dealer who had bought about 25-30 of them. Every day for ten days or two weeks, we had to have electricity strung to our electric light wagon, sometimes from the business area into the show grounds, sometimes as far as a quarter or a half mile. This allowed us to illuminate the show at night.

When we got over to Bellville, Illinois about ten days later, a man came on from Sterling, Kentucky, with the new engine,

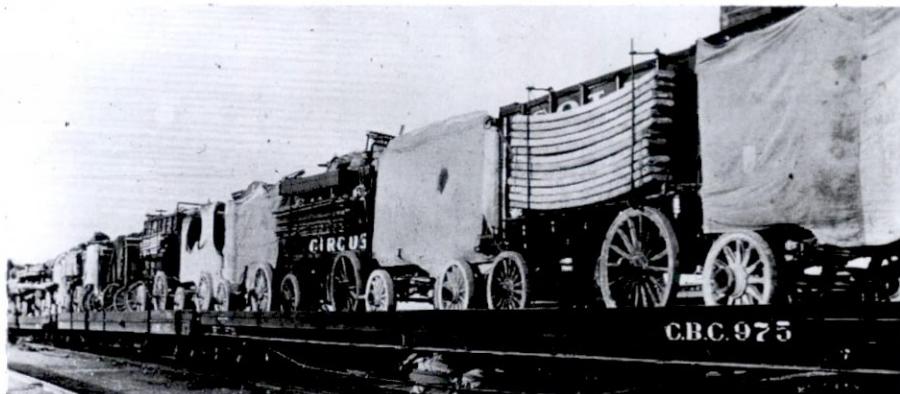
FLOYD KING A REMINISCENCE

PART ONE

replacing the old one which he took back. We'd already plugged in, so we went ahead that night in Bellville with this local wiring.

This cost us seven days at a minimum of \$50 [each day] to connect with the city lights. We moved on up the line and got up through Wisconsin and we were showing at Marquette, Minnesota. We had a legal adjuster named Nosey Swabb, who lived near Cincinnati. He had an assistant named Low Grass Bill Campbell, who originally came from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mr. Campbell was married to Mrs. Mabel Hall, whose parents had operated various small circuses. Mr. Campbell came to me and told me, "I don't know whether you know it or not, but there was a white boy on the side show who has a case of smallpox. I noticed it was broken out on his face." I got a hold of a cousin of mine named Fred Roberts. He had been an intern in the war and was an assistant to doctors and finally learned how to give shots, and get working men out of the sleeping car in the morning by giving them compound cathartic pills, and so forth. So I got a hold of Fred Roberts, who was a first cousin of mine and told him to go down and get this boy, go to the ticket wagon and get several books of Pennsylvania [railroad] mileage that ran from that northern country of Wisconsin into Chicago. I said, "Now I want you to take this boy, put him on a train which leaves Champion, Wisconsin, about

Part of Floyd King's ten car Cole Bros. Circus train in 1929. Pfening Archives.



seven o'clock at night and is due in Chicago the next morning about 7:30 or 8:00."

Several days went by, in fact it was a week, when I ran into Mr. Campbell again, he said to me, "I see that fellow with smallpox is still on the show, and his case is very evident, and now he has broken out on his face, his arms and his hands." I got a hold of Mr. Roberts and said, "Did you take this man to Chicago like I told you?" He says, "I'm awful sorry, but I forgot." Well I says, "Well, you're liable to get us into a great deal of smallpox trouble because he's still on the show and we have to get him off tonight, and I want you to take him into Chicago, and when you get to Chicago take him to a second or third or fourth class hotel that is fair, register him and pay him a week's lodging, keep him there a day or two, give him eating money, and ease on back to the show on the mileage, which you have." He says, "I will do it."

By this time we were in Ironwood, Michigan, which is adjacent to Ironwood, Minnesota. I was in a drugstore getting a Coca Cola, Mr. O. C. Cox, who had a concession with the show selling razors and so forth, came to me and says, "I was in the city hall and your man was arranging for the license." He told me that he was standing on the steps of City Hall when someone said, "Are you going to the circus today?" to some officials, and one says, "Yes. We got notification from Lansing, Michigan, they have smallpox on the show and we're on the way out there to investigate. If they have smallpox on the show, we'll keep them in the fairgrounds for two weeks until it is cleared up." I got in the automobile with Cox and we hurried out to the circus grounds. As we drove in the ball park, we saw this man sunning on the running gear of a side show wagon, the tongue was on the ground, he was taking a sun bath. One glance at him showed that he had a virulent case of smallpox. His arms, hands and face were literally covered with scores of smallpox sores. We got him in the car right quick and carried him about a quarter of a mile to

a small mountain, got him inside a fence and told him to stay there until we came out for him. If anybody came in, to not come near them but to go back up into the mountains. We hurried on back to the grounds and as we got there, we ran into several officials who told us they were health officers and had been instructed by the state health department in Lansing to investigate the Cole Bros. Circus thoroughly, that they heard that we had smallpox on the show. Well, I said, "The best thing to do is look it over," so we started at the candy stands and moved on around. I carried him back as slow as I could and got ahold of Fred Roberts, told him to go down to the sleeping cars and get everybody out, nobody to be in there at all. We went on back to the dressing rooms. We saw several of the athletes in there, in their shirt sleeves playing cards, there was no room for them to ride in the street parade. Well, he says, "These fellows all seem to be very healthy." So we moved on through the menagerie tent as slow as we could and then into the big tent, and then came over to the side show and the health fellow says, "Now we'll have to go down to the circus train to see if anybody's in there."

I had told Mr. Roberts that when he got this fellow planted over in the mountains to hurry on down and get everybody out of the sleeping cars. We got them about three hundred feet out of the ball park and we ran into Mr. Roberts on the way down to the train. When we got down to the train, the good Lord was with us. We went from one end to the other and there was nobody on there at all; however, we did know that our sleeping car porter on the private car that I used, along with others, had broken out with one large smallpox scar on his face. I told the health officer, "Well you could find nothing." He says, "We'll report back to headquarters in Lansing and tell them we found no evidence of smallpox on the show, and wait for their verdict." They came back to me a little bit later and said they had notification from the State Health Department in Lansing whereby every human being connected with the circus had to be vaccinated before the show would be allowed to move out of town.

So, as a result, we had about 200 people with the circus and, of course, smallpox vaccine in Ironwood, Michigan was very limited, so they sent over to a state prison located on the outskirts of Marquette, Michigan on the lake, to send over by motor troops about 225 vaccine capsules so that



The Cole Bros. side show band ready for a parade in 1930. Pfening Archives.

our men could be vaccinated. We lined up our people in the side show. I was the first one to be vaccinated, and when one or two kind of hesitated, I told them they either had to be vaccinated or get off the show and they decided to stay on. When they left the show grounds, I got ahold of Cox and we went over to this mountain where this virulent case had developed with this side show boy, got him and put him in the back seat of the automobile on the floor. I laid a lap robe over him and put my feet on top of that and started down to the train. At the train, we picked up the colored porter, who we luckily had missed earlier, and we put him in the front seat on the right of the driver and started to get out of town.

We got about half way over to Hurley, Minnesota, about three miles from the circus grounds, and we ran into the parade coming back on a one-way street. There was a line opening on the side. We pulled in there and were waiting for the parade to pass--while we were there waiting, with this boy on the floor of the car and the lap robe on top of him, a state patrolman came by on a motorcycle, parked his cycle alongside our automobile, with his hand resting on the auto body, and he was also waiting for the parade to pass. When the parade passed, we started out to get these two virulent cases of smallpox off the show. We got over to Ironwood and we skirted the town, went on over to Hurley and about five miles this side of Champion, Minnesota, we found a woods where a second growth of timber had been cut and we went through the fence and took these two smallpox victims back into the woods and told them we would be back for them. We were going to leave that night about a little after six o'clock to go to Champion to put them on the Milwaukee train to take them to the hospital. We told them to let no one get near them, if anybody

came back into the woods to hide from them. We went on back, it was a very hot day and during the afternoon Cox took some soda pop, Coca Cola, and sandwiches over to these two boys.

That night I told him to go over and pick these two boys up and take them over to Champion. The train leaves on to Milwaukee at seven o'clock. Take them in to Chicago, put them in a second or third class hotel upstairs, pay their rent for several days, and in a couple of days leave them spending money and walk on out and come on back to the circus with the route that you have and the mileage that you have to come back on. That night in Ironwood, after these people had been shipped off . . . or rather, that morning I was eating breakfast, I picked up the *Chicago Evening American* from the night before, printed in Chicago, which had arrived in Ironwood early that morning, and I read the first section, put the second section in my coat pocket, and went on out to the circus grounds. I hung my coat in the ticket wagon and I was busy all day with activities around the show, and that night about 5:30 I cleared my work up in the ticket wagon and reached over to read the second section of the newspaper and on the first page with a two column head and with a couple of drops of type, a whole full column and a quarter, a case which I will now describe.

It read like this: "Smallpox victim sent from circus picked up in Chicago and sent to pest camp." They had the complete story, that the conductor on the Milwaukee train saw these two patients, one of whom we had provided with a pair of ten cent gloves. He looked at them and figured that they had smallpox and he wired ahead to Milwaukee, where a Milwaukee railroad officer got on the train there. He wired on into Chicago, about 85 miles, and told them that there were definitely two cases of smallpox on the

such-and-such a car and to have this car taken out of the Union Depot there in Chicago upon arrival, with an ambulance to take these boys to the pest house.

When they got into Chicago, they were waiting for us. They had the pest control wagon there and the police arrested Fred Roberts, who had charge of them. He was tried in court several days later. In the meantime these men were taken to the pest house until the smallpox had been cleared up. We expected Fred Roberts back on the circus.

We got over into North Dakota in a town called Williston. In the spring going out of winter quarters, we had ordered about \$300 worth of Cracker Jack from the factory in Chicago and told them we would pay for them on June 15, which so happened was the date we were in Williston. I ran into Mr. Schwab and he told me that the sheriff had handed him papers where the circus had been attacked for \$300 for Cracker Jack. I told him that we had paid the bill and that the certified check had arrived in Chicago that particular Saturday morning. A little later the sheriff came over and told us to forget about the indictment and attachment as the check had arrived.

A little bit later we had a telegram from Walter Driver, associated with his brother Charlie in the manufacture of circus tents. This was a day letter from Walter from Chicago, saying that he had a phone call from a fellow in the County Workhouse. He said his name was Fred Roberts, and they were holding him there for \$225 for the balance of his fine for bringing smallpox patients into the state. Driver says "He asked me to get the money from you and pay it so he could get back to the circus." I quickly went to the Western Union and wired Mr. Driver the money and told him to send Fred Roberts on to the town we were coming to. So that ended the case of smallpox on the circus." When we got into North Dakota, we were very glad that smallpox was a thing of the past for us. If they had discovered smallpox on the show in Ironwood, Michigan, they would have held the circus inside the fairgrounds for two weeks. By that time we would be two weeks behind our billing crew, and the billing crew at that time, two weeks ahead, would be a thousand miles away and wandering through North Dakota into Montana. So, once, the good Lord was with us.

When we got into Thief River Falls, Minnesota several days later, the treasurer of the show ran into me on



Floyd King in the 1930s. Pfening Archives.

the street on Sunday morning, when we were not showing that day and told me, "Well, we got knocked off last night." I says, "What do you mean, we got knocked off?" "Well," he says, "Somebody got in the money safe and took out my money bag with the various half a dozen different bankrolls that were for different concession people with the circus. All together, in addition to these bankrolls, they got away with about \$250 in small change, and small bills belonging to the circus." I says, "Well, what happened to this big American Express safe where this money was locked up? Did you forget to lock it?" He says, "No, I always carefully lock it every night after I put the bag inside, and tested it carefully. When I opened it the next morning, the bag was gone and the safe was locked up." A little later during the day, some working men on the Great Northern Railroad on which we were traveling, came to the circus and said, "We found this money bag about thirty miles out of town." It was locked and they had broken it open and they brought it into the circus. We figured someone with the circus had made this robbery and threw this money bag out of the window after they had cleared up and got the money out. We had suspicions about several fellows around the circus. Later on that afternoon we went to the post office and asked if anybody had bought any large amount of money orders, and also went to the two or three banks there in Thief River Falls and asked them if anyone

had been in with a lot of small change to buy a draft or anything, out of which we could find nothing. About a week went by and the Treasurer came to me and said, "I think I'll have most of the stolen bankroll back on the show a little later in the day." I says, "Well, what happened?" He says, "Well, I got a hold of the porter and found out when you left winter quarters in Alexandria, Louisiana around about Christmas time, you had every lock on the show listed on a card. In among them was the key to the American Express safe. We found out this colored boy, whom you had picked up at Benton Harbor, Michigan, a pretty smart dark fellow, we found out that he had a duplicate key to the American Express safe file." The treasurer told me that during the course of the season several times he had missed various sums of money out of the ticket wagon. Anyway, he talked this fellow to give up the money and he brought it on down. Most of it had been returned. He had hidden most of it in the kitchen of my private car; he took the wooden part away from the commode and it was hidden in the commode behind the wooden part. We gave this colored boy some money to get him away from the show, and away he went.

The following winter along in January, I was going down Wabash Street in Chicago and I ran into the colored boy who was a smallpox victim. He told me he was working as a porter for the Auditorium Theater and he was very happy to be there, and he laughed about our experience with smallpox.

To make the day in Williston, North Dakota complete, just before the parade went out, our equestrian director came to me and says, "Mr. King, myself and my wife would like to place our two weeks' notice in. I have located a small circus out in Nebraska with several trucks and I'm going out there in two weeks to get it ready to open up on the road." I says, "Well, I'll see you right after the parade." I tried to make it a point when anyone asked me a vital question to stall them a little while so I could study in my mind what would be the best answer to the problem. When the parade came back, I told the equestrian director I was paying him \$75 a week, and his wife \$75. She done an iron jaw act and sang in the spectacle. I told him, "I know you want to get this circus started as soon as you could, and I tell you I'm going to do you a big favor, I'm going to give you a hold back amounting to \$300 for two weeks, your wife and yourself, so you can go out and get this circus

started." The equestrian director looked a little aghast, but there was not much he could say because he had figured two additional weeks would give him about \$300 more to invest in the circus. When the parade came back, I noticed clouds began to gather. It was a Saturday afternoon and the tent was packed with people, every seat occupied. We had a brand new top, we'd only had it on a week or two, I ran up in the seats and asked everybody to move out until the storm passed over. No one paid any attention to me. The band kept playing and I ran outside to help them guy out. I had a brand new Dobbs hat and the wind hit it and I'm still looking for it.

I saw this storm coming up. I sent word back to go ahead and start as quickly as possible, as I figured that the show started and as they saw the menagerie and the beginning of the circus, there would be no refunds. I got inside and the storm really hit. Poles bounced up and down.

Anyway, ropes tied from the big top to the stakes snapped like string. We ran inside and was still trying to get the people out on the outside; told them that after the storm passed they could come back in. About that time the rain started hitting the tent and all the farmers spoke up and said, "Son, you got nothing to worry about now, because this rain will fall on the tent and make it heavy and keep it from bouncing away." A heavy downpour of rain ran for a little while, after which the clouds disappeared and the circus continued on.

So, that night a few people came out who said they had left that afternoon and wanted to see it again tonight--they had left early on account of the storm, which we allowed them to go on and see the big show.

The equestrian director went on, and I found out later the next day, that he had gone to our band leader and made a deal with him to lead the band, and he gone to a couple of Japanese performers--one who walked on his head--and he and his partner done a high pole act in which one of them stood on his head on top of the pole. It took me a day or two to round up these Japanese to give them the idea to forget about going into the circus business. One of them told me that the two of them had invested about \$250 in the circus. This \$250 wouldn't even buy a first class cash register for the front door. Anyway, I talked them out of leaving and going to this circus, however the side show manager went on back to Kentucky. He wanted to join the Mighty Haag Show.

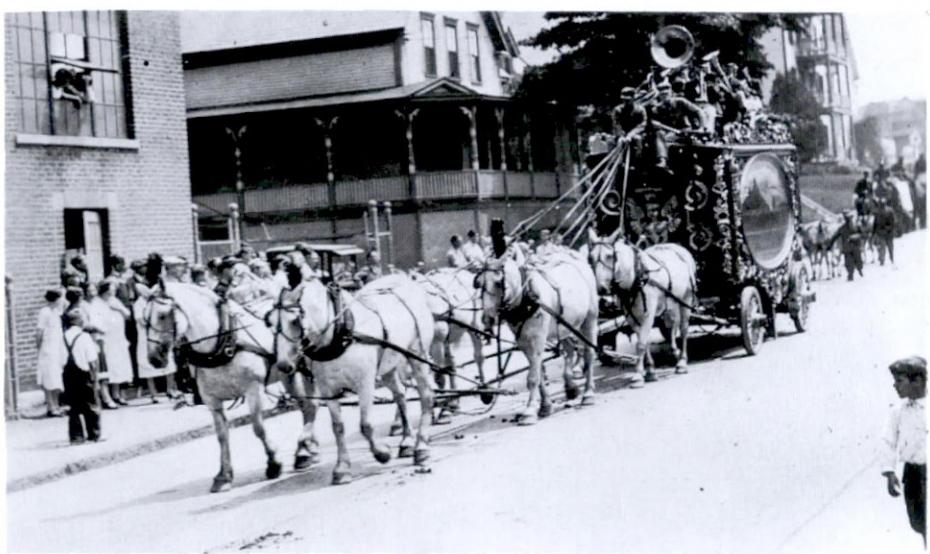
So, altogether, we really had an ex-

citing time in Williston. Due to the Good Lord and everything, we had a terrific day's business in Williston, which always seems to be a splendid circus town, period.

Among the many circus men that I have met during my career, one of the finest characters I was ever associated with was Jerry Mugivan, who was a founder of the Mugivan, Bowers and Ballard shows. They later sold out to John Ringling. After they had obtained a lease for the New York Garden, they sold out to John Ringling for a million, four hundred and fifty dollars [incorrect amount], which included the five circuses they owned: Hagenbeck-Wallace, Sells-Floto, Al G. Barnes, John Robinson Circus, and the Sparks Circus. Mr. Mugivan was in Peru, Indiana after he had sold the show. My circus had closed in Brenham, Texas in 1929, in the first year the depression which started in, I believe . . . I forgot just now the date it did start, the depression; but, anyway I will remember in a second or two. Anyway, I jumped into Chicago from Brenham, Texas, I was there a day or two and figured I'd better go down and see Mr. Mugivan and figured I might be able to make some kind of deal with him. I got into Peru and went down to the Wabash Valley Trust Company, which Mugivan and Bowers controlled, Mr. Bert Bowers, his half owner, was president of the bank. Mr. Mugivan says, "Well, I'll tell you what, King, we've sold all the shows and I'm doggone sorry now that I sold them, but my partner, Bert Bowers, here and Zack Terrell wanted the money they had in the circuses, they wanted that, and we decided to sell all out to John Ringling, which we did. But, I re-

A former Ringling tableau on King's number two circus Gentry Bros. on ten cars. Pfening Archives.

peat, I'm doggone sorry now." We talked along for a while and he says, "Now your number two circus is down in Brenham, Texas. What would it cost to ship that up and clear up the indebtedness and send it to West Baden, Indiana, where the fifteen car circus had been shipped after it closed in Paris, Tennessee. What would it cost to clear up the debts on both shows?" I figured it up and I said, "I believe \$40,000 and everybody could be paid off to their satisfaction." He says, "Well, I'll tell you; here's a proposition I'll make you. You get a hold of Charlie Sparks in Macon, Georgia, (I believe this was a Monday there in Peru) tell him to be in West Baden, Indiana next Saturday morning to meet us, Bert Bowers, myself and you. Now here's the proposition we'll make you: we'll take these two shows, take the best equipment from each one, instead of having a twenty-five car show we'll cut it down to twenty cars. You will be the general agent; Charlie Sparks will be the general manager. We'll put up the dough." They figured a new big top for a twenty car circus and they had a couple of wagons they had to change around, add on a couple of cars and take off other cars, they found out it would cost about \$60,000 all told; \$40,000 for the two shows and \$20,000 to get it ready for the road. Bowers spoke up and says, "We'll just as well figure it as about \$100,000." I says, "What title would you call the circus?" Mugivan says, "Well, we would call it Cole Bros., that's a very good title; you used that the past year with the ten car show. And when the \$100,000 is paid off, you will own 25%, Charlie Sparks will own 25%, myself and Bert Bowers will own the balance, 50%." He says, "You get on the train next Friday night and we'll drive on over to Lafayette and get a Monon train into La-



fayette. You grab the train in Chicago and be in West Baden on Saturday morning and we'll try to consummate the deal."

I went on back to Chicago that afternoon and I make a great mistake. Instead of getting Charlie Sparks on the telephone explaining the details, I figured Mr. Sparks was pretty sore about Mr. Mugivan buying the Sparks Circus, and he was very sore that he had sold the circus. So I sent Mr. Sparks a wire, "Will you please meet me in West Baden, Indiana next Saturday, I have a deal of vital importance for you." I was afraid to commit too much, whereas if I had talked to him on the phone no doubt it would have been a great deal different. So that night about 7:30, I was in my room at the Planter's Hotel in Chicago, a phone call came from Mr. Mugivan asking if I had heard from Charlie Sparks yet. Just at that instance somebody knocked on the door and it was the bellboy with a telegram. I said a telegram just came in. The wire said, "Sorry, I'll be unable to be in West Baden on Saturday. Signed Charlie Sparks." Mr. Mugivan said, "I'll tell you what. You get on that train Friday night and when we get down to West Baden we'll get Charlie on the phone and get him up there."

I got on the train that night and when we got to Lafayette Mr. Mugivan and Mr. Bowers got on. The next morning we were there in West Baden, snow was on the ground, and Howe's London Show [wrong title] had come in to winter quarters. We waded around in this snow about two feet deep, myself trailing Mr. Mugivan and Bert Bowers, and I noticed there seemed to be a difference in the attitude of the two fellows, and I began to sense that things didn't look too clear for this new show going out the following year. Along about five o'clock we got over to the West Baden hotel. Mr. Mugivan, Mr. Bowers and I, we all went in and sat down, and he says, "Floyd, I'll tell you what; since I talked with you in Peru, Mr. Bowers has changed his attitude. He wants to take a trip around the world. I've got all my business cleared up, my wills made and every thing, I've got a double hernia and I'm going to be operated on in Detroit by that circus doctor there, and I'm not going to do anything at all until I come out of the hospital."



A Howe's Great London cage in a parade around 1910. Pfening Archives.

I went on down to Sarasota, Florida and had several talks with John Ringling, who had just purchased these different circuses, and while I was there I had a wire from Chicago that Mr. Mugivan had died on the operating table, a blood clot had formed while the doctor was performing the operation. And the statement was that Mr. Mugivan said to his wife as he was dying, "Well, I finally made a sucker out of myself," meaning, of course, he was getting along all right with this double hernia when he decided to be operated on. So that ended the Cole Bros. twenty car circus.

In 1903 a circus went out of Kansas City, Missouri called the Howe's Great London Show. It had originally been owned by the Smith brothers, who were railroad conductors out of Kansas City. It was operated by one of the Smith widows. Concessions in those days weren't a big item, that is, cotton candy, hot dogs, novelties and so forth, side show concessions; they were kind of a side issue and didn't amount to a great deal. Jerry Mugivan and Mr. Bowers, together they cut \$5,000 and they bought concessions with the Howe's Great London ten car circus from Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith was a Catholic and Jerry Mugivan was a Catholic, and they were down around Atlanta, Georgia and Mr. Mugivan wanted to go into Atlanta to get some concessions, supplies and snugging rope and so forth, so he told Mrs. Smith that he would be away a couple of nights and Mr. Bowers will go down and walk with you at night with the money bag. She says, "Jerry Mugivan, I trust no Protestant S.O.B." Mr. Bowers was, of course, a Protestant.

In 1908 [actually 1904], Mr. Bowers

and Mr. Mugivan formed a partnership in that they leased ten different railroad cars from different parties, one of which belonged to the Arms Palace people in Chicago used for shipping race horses, a baggage car. They leased that car for a bill car and had it shipped down to Kansas City. The billposters had arrived and no place for them to sleep, so Mr. Mugivan and Mr. Bowers got some lumber together and the billposters built berths in this baggage car, and

lockers where they could store the paper. The circus went out as the Howe's Great London Circus [actually Van Amburg]. They had a total of ten cars, as stated previously, he had four cross cages, one containing a lioness, another a grey wolf, and in another section a black wolf, some monkeys and some cockatoos. That comprised the menagerie.

The show went on from year to year. In 1912, I had been with the Al G. Barnes Circus in California for forty weeks. I had gotten a job that winter in Montgomery, Alabama as a reporter on the morning *Advertiser*. I was in Montgomery all winter and Mugivan and Bowers was wintering the Howe's Great London Circus at the fairgrounds, and also had a No. 2 show which they called Sanger's Show, which was operated by Mugivan's brother, Sheldon Mugivan, and Mr. Bowers' brother. They operated this Sanger's show for a couple of years. It was not a success so they discontinued it.

In 1912, there in Montgomery during the winter and I became acquainted with Mr. Mugivan and Mr. Bowers. I was out to their winter quarters about once a week and, luckily, I gave them a nice big story almost every Sunday about the circus getting ready for the road and that was the beginning of my relationship with Mugivan and Bowers. I had signed up, before I got to Montgomery, with R. M. Harvey, general agent of the Howe's Great London Circus, as general press representative of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. Mr. Mugivan was quite familiar with Mr. Wallace. He had been with this show in other years, and he looked quite favorably on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus. That was in 1913. When I got to St. Louis, where I was ordered to report, I

found out that they had a great flood at Peru, Indiana and they had lost five or six elephants and a great many animals, horses and so forth. The river had risen suddenly and flooded the winter quarters and caused loss of thousands of dollars to Mr. Wallace. However, the circus went out on schedule, opening in Marion, Indiana, and I was with this Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus from 1913 through 1918 as general press representative. Every year they gave me a nice raise and the last year I was with them was in 1918.

On the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus I met the press agent back with the show, George Atkinson. George . . . a very likeable character. In the old days he had been an actor, a black-faced comedian.

In a year or two I was taking with Mr. Atkinson and he says, "I believe if we took out a small burlesque show in the winter time, we could make a nice sizeable amount of money." The sideshow manager with the Hagenbeck-Wallace show previously had been Warren Harness. He was the side show manager at the start of the 1913 season. When the circus got to Detroit around Decoration Day, Mr. Harness was quite observant in walking about town and saw a large theater called the Avenue on Woodward Avenue, leading down to the ferry going into Windsor, Ontario, and it was empty. He talked to the owner and made arrangements to lease this theater. He found out a fellow who was over in Dixon, Illinois and had a repertory musical comedy, so he went over there and made a deal. They went in together as partners and he brought this musical comedy repertory stock show, and from that day turned it into a burlesque performance. They operated that for years and years and they made a ton of money, after which they owned or leased a theater in Cleveland and in later years, Mr. Harness operated a stock burlesque in Kansas City, Missouri, when stage shows began to die down along about the time of talking pictures in 1927.

In the operation of this burlesque show that I took out with Mr. Atkinson, we found out that the people had written letters in, saying they had an ordinance against burlesque shows in this city, have you got a small musical comedy you could send us? We found out that they desperately wanted musical shows for the general public, and not burlesque. Very quickly, I thought of a title, "Oh, Johnny, Oh!" That was a song that a great many people were humming "Oh, Johnny, Oh! How He Could Love," and so forth, and I thought that would be a good title for a

musical comedy one nighter. So, while I was in Kalamazoo, Michigan, I had a cut made of "Oh, Johnny, Oh." and after I got the cut, in the next town I had a letterhead made on pink stationery and envelopes and when I got down to a town in Indiana--Frankfort, Indiana, I believe it was--I had a stock herald made called "Oh, Johnny, Oh!" with a lot of pictures in it, a four page folder. I got a hold of a little money from the show and sent a couple of hundred dollars into the National Printing Company in Chicago and told them to an assortment of quarter sheets and half sheets on down to sixteen or twenty sheet of a stock musical comedy paper that I could use, and had it crosslined to read "Oh, Johnny, Oh!" The first town I booked, I sent out about ten letters one night from Pittsburgh, where I was, I walked on down and mailed them in the depot mailbox. It went out on a train that night.

I was stopping in the Henry Hotel in Pittsburgh and before I got out of bed the next morning, here came a phone call in from [not stated]. He says, "I got your letter this morning about your musical show, "Oh, Johnny, Oh!" and we can use that particular date that you have." I says, "Well, we book these shows at 75-25 and 80-20." "Well," he says, "most of them play for me for 70-30." I says, "Well, I'll tell you what. If you will give us an extraordinary good strong billing, I'll play you for 70-30." So I went into this town with the paper and everything and we placed the ads and made arrangements with the theater manager and signed the contract for the hauling of the baggage and so forth. The date previously to this town in Pennsylvania was McKeesport, Pennsylvania, where we showed an upstairs theater, which had been used for burlesque in other years. The terms there, I believe, were 60-40; we got 60%

High Grass Bill Campbell's sleeper and baggage car with end doors open. King bought the cars in the fall of 1918. Pfenning Archives.

and they got 40%. So we showed there two days and we made a little money and we moved on into this town in Pennsylvania and we'd been running along getting two and three hundred dollars a day, total gross, with this burlesque (or musical comedy?). When we got into this town in Pennsylvania, we gave one big performance, a sell-out, and took in a little over seven hundred dollars in cash. Well, I said to myself, this is the end of burlesque, it will be musical comedy from now on. At the end of the season, I had in the bank for my share, \$5,000. The next year we went out, at the end of the season, I had \$2,500 in the bank. The two years together we had a total of \$7,500 in the bank. Anyway, when I cleared up all the debts, I still had left in the bank \$5,000 clear--and I'll go from this point on to my going into the circus business in 1919.

In 1918, I was in Chicago the latter part of December and in the Prentiss Hotel I ran into a fellow named Bill Godfrey. I found out later that he was a brother of the famous radio man who talked on the radio--I forgot if his name was Bill or Arthur; but, anyway, I ran into him and I asked him where he had been all the years. He says "I was on the Barnum show as legal adjuster, but on account of the fact that they consolidated the two shows and going out in 1919 as Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Combined Shows, I was the last man on as legal adjuster so, of course, I'm out for 1919." He says, "I have a letter here from a fellow down in Oklahoma who has a little two car circus for sale, and I'm trying to raise some funds from Dode Fisk." He had been in circus business in prior years and lived up in Wisconsin, to see if he could raise some funds and put out this two car circus. I says, "I'll tell you what, if Dode Fisk is not interested, I might possibly be interested myself." I had this theatrical show out on the road, this was the third winter, and we're making plenty of money with it and I had \$5,000 in



the bank, so I figured maybe I'd better possibly get into business for myself. So I says, to repeat, "If he's not interested, I might possibly be." And I went on down the street to the National Printing Company where I was buying printing, and an hour or two later that night about five o'clock, I was coming down Madison Street in front of the old Morrison Hotel and I ran into Mr. Godfrey. He said, "You know I was up to your room in the Prentiss several times looking for you. I'm interested in what you said about you might be interested in taking over that circus in Oklahoma in a town called Okeene." It was a two car circus owned by High Grass Bill Campbell, who lived in this little town in Oklahoma, population about 300, and he wanted to sell the circus for, I believe, \$4,500. It consisted of a sleeping car, all equipped with the berths and so forth, and one baggage car, six Shetland ponies, two high school horses, and two horses which we had to get for baggage horses. So I read his letter over carefully after Mr. Godfrey gave me the letter and I says, "I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll go out there to Okeene, Oklahoma and look this over and I'll try to make a deal with him. And the proposition with you, you tell me you don't have any money whatsoever, but you had been with Elmer Jones for several years as a legal adjuster. Mr. Jones had two two-car circuses out, one called Cole Bros. and another called Cooper Bros., and you told me you were thoroughly familiar with all the details of operating these little two car circuses."

I'd been with the Hagenbeck-Wallace fifty car circus for six consecutive years, so I had never seen a two car circus in operation. I knew nothing about it. This was my mistake number one. If I'd known about it, I'd have gone around a two car show, stayed there for several days and at least learned some of the details of the operation of a small two car circus. I went out to Okeene, Oklahoma and I saw this equipment, which was painted up nicely, and so forth, and I talked with Mr. Campbell. He was the nephew of the original Campbells out of Fairbury, Nebraska, who had the thirty car Campbell Bros. Circus on the road for quite a number of years. And he had operated this two car show for two or three years and he seemed to want to get out of the business. I made deal with Mr. Campbell, if I remember right, I paid him \$2,500 cash and gave him a note for \$1,500 to be paid the following July 1st. I went on back to Chicago and I got a hold of Godfrey and I

says, "Tell you what. I'll appoint you as manager of the show," and I told him the deal I made. "You go out to Okeene, Oklahoma as fast as you can get out there (this was in January) and get the show ready for the road, hire the people, the band and everything. You tell me you're quite familiar with all the details. You'll be associated with my brother. I'll send him on to the show as the treasurer. He'll have money to operate during the winter time to get the show on the road, but you'll work along with him. He'll have charge of the money section. You have charge of the management."

Newspaper ad for King's circus in 1921. Pfening Archives.

I later joined them in the latter part of March and early April. They were ready for the road. He had written me at various times about different people he had hired and told me he had a contract band engaged in Chicago, ten people, and they would be out all together. So when I got out to Okeene, Oklahoma, I started out in advance of the show. I was two weeks ahead and three days behind me were the billposters. I had two or three billposters hired, nice competent men. And when I went down to the depot, he came down and said he had just gotten a wire from the bandleader in Chicago stating on account of the illness of his mother-in-law, he would be unable to join us. This was two weeks ahead of the show and we didn't have one band man engaged. Anyway, I sent ads in to *The Oklahoman*, the Wichita paper and several large dealers in that area: "WANTED. Musicians for road show, cornet player, trombone player." I divided it all up, wouldn't put them all together in one category, figuring we had no one at all, so I divided it up, some for a bass drummer, some for a snare drummer, and so forth like that. Anyway, when the circus opened, it opened on time with a band, was able to get part of the old band from this two car circus that had

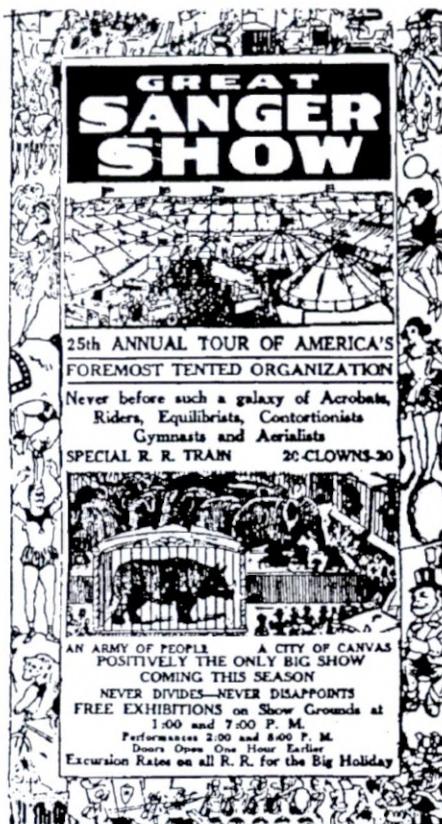
been previously operating that had been called the Campbell Show. We went out on the road down through Oklahoma. We tried to play as many of the oil towns as we could.

We ran into opposition right away with the Cole Bros. show and I met for the first time a very loveable character named L. C. Gillette, who was general agent for Elmer Jones' two car Cole Bros. Circus. He told me the route they were playing and I got together with him so I wouldn't go into the towns they were playing. He asked me which way I wanted to go. I says, "Any way at all to make a buck, but I want to go to western Canada." So I routed the show--they were going ahead right into Canada--and I routed the show through Oklahoma, the oil towns, into Kansas, and out through western Kansas into Colorado and on the D & RG Railroad on up to Ogden, Utah; and from there on in to Sand Point, Idaho and Bonners Ferry, Idaho, and from there on into western Canada

through Alberta.

We entered Canada. We had a very small circus, two cars, no elephants, nothing, and there was a lot I had to learn around a two car circus. One thing, I shouldn't advertise anything I didn't have. The result of it was, we advertised on billboards--elephants, camels and a menagerie, which we didn't have. I found out if we had advertised strictly what we had, we would have done a great deal better. We went into western Canada and the first several days were very splendid. There were four additional two car shows in western Canada: Cole Bros., my show called Sanger's European Shows., Cooper Bros., that was three car trick, a fellow named Low Grass Bill Campbell from Philadelphia, married to Mabel Hall, he had a two car circus up there. Then another two car circus was Christy Bros. out of Houston, Texas.

We got up into Canada and we found business was just about what it





was down in the States, very lousy, ordinary, just about enough to get by on. So we was up there several weeks and I routed the show out. We came out at Porter, North Dakota, and the first stand in the States was Kenmare, North Dakota. When we were over in Idaho [before going into Canada], a colored fellow approached my brother, who was the manager of the show, and said, "Are you all headed anywhere toward Chicago?" My brother said, "Well, we're headed in a straight line for there." So the first thing he knew, we were in Canada. He says, "I thought you was headed in a straight line for Chicago." My brother said, "Well, we're going to detour through here on down to Chicago."

Anyway, you know how they are, follows with circuses in those days. They gave them board and lodging and a few dukes to get cigarettes and tobacco on, and a few extra dollars and that was it. So, when we got into Kenmare, the first thing the legal adjuster done, he went down and contacted the Justices of the Peace, there were one or two in town and told them they were there with the circus that day and any time anyone came up with a suit, just tell them they had already been engaged by the circus and there were two constables that could issue a suit and gave each one of them a ten dollar bill and told them if anybody come up to just tell them that they had already been engaged and they couldn't do anything. This colored fellow said, "Well, if I didn't have so many good friends around this show, I'd put gun powder under those two cars and blow them up."

Anyway, we whipped on along. In the meantime, I forgot to mention, we'd been out on the road about three

In 1924 King expanded his show to five cars using the Harris Bros. title. Pfening Archives.

weeks, I caught the show for the second time in Hutchinson, Kansas, as they were going through there down at the depot. I said to my brother, "Where is Godfrey?" "Why," he said, "he's back in Chicago, he didn't know a thing in the world about the operation. I founded a two car circus. He had no band when we opened, I mean we had to get a band together; instead of hiring individually he hired a contact band, and when you lost the leader you lost them all. And he kept wanting to take the show into Kansas City to reorganize." My brother said to him, "You went all along now organizing the show and now you want to go in to get it reorganized." So he gave him his fare back to Chicago and that ended our association with Godfrey. I later ran into Godfrey in New York. He told me he was back again with the candy company he had been previously connected with. His brother then, who was a great radio star, was driving a taxi around Chicago.

With this two car circus we struggled along, just getting enough to get from one town to another. The first business we really ran into was down in Arkansas on a branch road running out of Blytheville on over to Jonesboro. There was about three or four towns on that road and we showed each one of them and we had a big day's business.

The next year we went out again under the same title, wintering in Memphis. In August we bought an elephant in Muskogee, Oklahoma, called "Little Hip." It had been previously in the Hippodrome in New York City. It worked with girls in a disappearing act under water. This elephant was highly

trained and we shipped him from Muskogee over to the show in Arkansas, along with the elephant came the trainer who had a chimpanzee, and that attracted a great deal of attention, too. Anyway both of the animals and the trainer stayed around the circus for several weeks.

That year we wintered in Memphis again, and I was out in California as a witness for Al G. Barnes in a lawsuit. I got a wire from my brother that the elephant had died in winter quarters. They had an autopsy performed and he had contracted pneumonia and passed on. Anyway the first elephant we had, we only had him several months before we lost him.

The next year I got another elephant from Mugivan and Bowers, an old runaway elephant that they wanted to get rid of. We got over in West Virginia and he ran away one night, we finally got him back again-- he didn't hurt anyone. So we went along, I think this was about the third or fourth year we were out, and we were up in Ohio and Pennsylvania on the Erie Railroad. They had a rule on the Erie Railroad that they could not haul a circus, so we hauled this two car show as a theatrical show. We were showing in Kent, Ohio, where a state university is located and that night we would take the elephant, with a camel we had acquired, and tie them to the steps of the baggage car and load the show and put these animals in later. It seemed during the day, it was in a terrific hot spell in July, one of those intense hot days when the thermometer is over a hundred. It seemed that they had unloaded a carload of apples down at the depot and when they unloaded them, the bad apples they threw in a barrel. The barrel was right near this elephant and he would stick his snout in there and eat these partly decayed apples. The result of it was, the next day when we got over into, I believe, Ravenna, Ohio, we found out that gas had formed in the elephant and was swollen up so he could hardly get out of the baggage car. We took him out to the circus grounds and got a hold of a veterinarian. There was nothing he could do and the first thing we knew, this elephant fell over dead. Gas had formed around his heart, his stomach had swollen up almost twice its size. Anyway, a circus man never gives up, so our pit show man spread a canvas sidewall around the elephant, took in over a little over \$200 that day exhibiting the dead elephant to the public for 15-20 cents apiece. That ended our number two elephant with the circus.

Altogether my brother and I, over the period of years we operated the circuses, lost about six elephants. Elephants are very susceptible to pneumonia and other diseases, and they have to be kept out of drafts and you have to handle them very carefully. I picked up three elephants, one from the Sells-Floto Circus and two additional ones I bought from Bartel's Animal Company in New York. These were delivered to me over at Jersey City. This baggage car with the elephant, I picked up at Hartford, Connecticut, I shipped down to Jersey City and we were loading these two elephants. Number one of the two elephants that we had bought, about ten years of age, had no trouble walking up an automobile platform directly into the baggage car, along with the large elephant that we bought from the Sells-Floto Circus. This third elephant we couldn't do much with. We put a rope around his hind leg and ran him through the baggage car, and every time he would give a little, we would tighten it up. It took us about an hour to load this elephant an inch at a time into the baggage car. We shipped those three elephants on to the show, which at that time was in Escanaba, Michigan. When the show got into Escanaba that morning, the manager looked out and saw the baggage car and knew the elephants had arrived, so instead of taking the elephants out to the grounds, he put them in the parade right from the downtown area. During the parade, one elephant fell over dead. Come to find out later, it was that elephant we had a great deal of trouble loading, that he had contracted pneumonia. The veterinarian who performed the autopsy said he had contracted pneumonia working up that intense sweat getting him into the baggage car and later cooling off in the baggage car.

So altogether, as I said, we lost six out of twenty or more elephants that we owned at various times. I had been in contact with most of the circus owners of the past two or three generations. Among the various characters that I have met were Walter L. Main, Jerry Mugivan, Bert Bowers, Fred Gollmar, Charlie Gollmar, Fred Buchanan, John Ringling, Charles Ringling, Charles Hunt, Ernest Haag, and most of the other gentlemen who were famous in the circus world. Among these characters I met, one of the early ones that I had



Walter L. Main, long time circus owner.
Pfening Archives.

a business dealing with was Walter L. Main. Main was one of the smart showmen of his generation. He started out with the Walter L. Main Circus, and along about 1893, I believe it was, he had a serious [train] wreck in western Pennsylvania and he had a good attorney. Quite a number of people and nearly half of the equipment was totally destroyed--sleeping cars, baggage wagons, and so forth--these were located near Altoona, Pennsylvania, the general shops of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and Main's attorney was very

After the sale of the Forepaugh-Sells circus the Columbus *Dispatch*, feeling sure the show would leave Columbus, published this cartoon. John Polacsek collection.

fortunate in getting the railroad to rebuild this equipment that had been destroyed. They built new baggage wagons, flat cars, stock cars and so forth, and they sent him out on the road in about ten days with a complete circus with modern cars, and so forth, replacing those that had been destroyed. There was no doubt, it was strictly the fault of the railroad. They were showing a town on top of a mountain and the engineer wanted a loaded flat car to be hooked on in front of the engine with the brakes on to slow it down. They turned him down on this and on the way down the mountain, the engine got away and they jumped the track and completely wrecked the train, and, as I stated, killed quite a number of men.

Walter L. Main was the owner of the show. He had a quick trained mind. The only trouble about Main was he had larceny in his entire system. He was always out to trim someone. In 1905, the Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Circus was auctioned off at Columbus, Ohio. Nearly every circus owner in the country was there. Some wanted to buy an elephant, some a high school horse, and this and that. When they got there and they opened up the sale, the auctioneer says, "I have for sale the great Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Circus, now owned by Lew Sells, James A. Bailey, and W. W. Cole; am I offered a bid?" James A. Bailey spoke up and said, "I'll bid \$150,000." Well no one wanted to bid against Bailey, because they figured no matter what they bid, Bailey would outdistance them. So he said, "Sold outright to James A. Bailey." Later that afternoon, down at the Chittenden Hotel, James A. Bailey and Otto Ringling came out of an elevator and announced that half of the Forepaugh-Sells Bros. show had been sold to Ringling Bros. and was now jointly owned by James A. Bailey and the Ringling Bros.

They bought the Forepaugh-Sells Bros. show, which had been a great money maker, had the famous loop-the-loop man on the bicycle with it. They had bought this show as a leverage to keep off the opposition. They had spent a great deal of money in other years fighting one another. They figured with this show they could route them and avoid opposition in the future. This circus was taken out later by Al Ringling. The Ringling



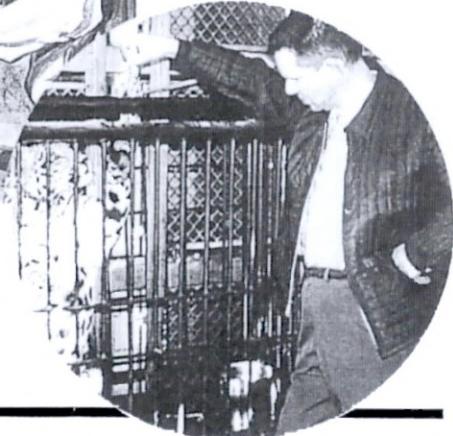
Bros. occasionally used to have some terrific battles among themselves, give them credit for one thing, though, of the five brothers if they took a vote, the winning side never said anything to the losing side; they went right on ahead and nothing was ever said to the losers. But they took a vote on everything when there was a dispute.

Their cousin [Henry Moeller] there in Baraboo, Wisconsin told me he was in winter quarters, he built the wagons for them, he was a first cousin and built all the wagons in those days, parade wagons and baggage wagons, he and his brother, for the Ringling Bros., and they were expert wagon builders. He told me one day there in the winter time, the office boy came down from the Ringling Bros. winter quarters, saying they wanted him down at the office of the circus in Baraboo. He got down there, the office was upstairs in a story and a half building, downstairs used for the audit and bookkeeping department, and upstairs was a little cubbyhole where the brothers used to meet and decide the policy that they were to follow. They told me that John was away from the show. There were four brothers there, two of them wanted the spec a certain way and two of them wanted it another way. There was one bachelor in the crowd, that was Otto Ringling; he had nowhere to loaf at night, he lived with his brother Alf T. Ringling and his wife, but at nighttime he would wander down to the wagon works and he would sit around and cut it up with the wagon builder. He would tell them different things that happened during the year, how they'd put on a sideshow and how it should be, a steel side sill to replace it, and different things. So he said he became quite familiar with Otto, being he was down almost every night cutting it up with him, discussing various details of the circus, so he presented the case to him when he got up there in the office, two of them wanted the spec a certain way and two of them wanted it another way, and he said he didn't know a damn thing about the spec, but he went along with Otto because he was closely associated with him. He said the following August, Ringling Bros. was over at Madison, Wisconsin, he and several of the boys there in Bar-

aboo went over to see the circus and they were standing in the connection when the spec went by, and he says Al Ringling came over and put his arm on

his shoulder and says, "How do you like your spec?" It seems that the spec they were using was the spec that he had voted for along with Otto.

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This paper was read at the annual meeting of the National Society for the Preservation of Tent, Folk and Repertoire Theater in America in April, 1996.

The general pattern of the use of ethnic symbols in American entertainment follows a rather close script. In it the outsider appears initially as a subject of ridicule, and, in time, assumes heroic proportions. This scenario is rampant in literature and drama. Shakespeare's Shylock in *A Merchant of Venice* is a classical example. Today's movies use the theme over and over, *ad nauseum*, because the star system tells us before we buy the ticket who will triumph at story's end.

As a convention of our Revolutionary era there was the "Yankee" character, whose idiosyncrasies of thought and language were used in opposition to the refined "English manners" of his supposed betters. The theme was carried on long after that time. In fact, and appropriate to this gathering, I think the "Tobey" character of tented repertory was an extension of this "Yankee" personage, the rube who in the end proves wiser, or more clever, than his supposed social betters.

The German, the Irishman, and the Jew were all, in turn, characterized in this way in American entertainment. They all began as outsiders, objects of ridicule, and gradually displayed empathetic qualities which transformed them from the butts of jokes into the virtuous heroes of theatrical myth. There was one exception to this metamorphosis, the African as portrayed in the enormously popular minstrel shows of the nineteenth century.

As we know, Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom was a sympathetic, though whining creature, but quite likely the very first novelistic treatment of a black man as a normal human being, having the emotional qualities of all humankind. Likewise, black characters on the stage, a phenomenon dating from before the Revolution, spoke the English of their day, without the exaggerations and the comicalities that made the minstrel show what it was, a portrayal of blacks as persons with no serious qualities. In the minstrel show they were seen as clowns, and it is not surprising, therefore, that when we look into the early days of such characterizations, we find them emanating from the circus ring.

Prior to this, however, an Englishman, one Charles Mathews, became fascinated by Afro-American speech and habits during a visit in 1822, and

THE CIRCUS ROOTS OF NEGRO MINSTRELSY

By Stuart Thayer

in a lecture titled *Scenes From America*, blacked his face to sing a song *Possum Up a Gum Tree*, the first recorded example of a white man borrowing Negro material for a blackfaced act. Unlike later portrayals, Mathews took his subjects seriously, and presented them just as he saw them, without exaggeration or condescension.

Robert C. Toll and Hans Nathans have written the most scholarly histories on Negro minstrelsy, and they agree that Thomas D. Rice's character of "Jim Crow" was the first of what we might call the "rude" theatrical portrayals of black people. Rice observed an apparently crippled and elderly man doing an odd-looking dance while singing the words that eventually became the song *Jim Crow*. Rice copied the gestures and steps, and even purchased the man's patched and tattered clothing for what became a novelty stage presentation. But most important, Rice performed the act in blackface. By doing this he cemented the racial feature to the eccentric gyrations. Unlike Mathews, Rice can be said to have made fun of his subject.

In all probability this characterization of a black man as poor, simple and comic merely reinforced prejudices already held by some of Rice's audiences. There had been similar portrayals in the past, but none achieved the immense popularity of Rice's Jim

The full stage of Thatcher, Primrose, and West's Minstrels in the 1880's. Harvard Theatre Collection.

Crow character. And if in fact, most of those who saw him and his followers in minstrelsy, had never seen a black man, then they were presented with a cartoon which they had no way of knowing was such. I have to be careful, here, as I know of no study that has attempted to discern what the contemporary percentage of people was who had seen a black person before the Civil War.

The time-frame in which this all occurred is somewhat hazily marked. Rice is reported as doing what are described as "Negro bits" as entreaties as early as 1828, though the Jim Crow piece was apparently perfected a year later. One commentator wrote that it was first presented in Louisville; another claims it was in Cincinnati. By 1832 he was performing it in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and in November of that year made his New York debut at the Lafayette Theatre.

Now let us turn to the thesis of this paper, as embodied in its title, and that is the circus ring as the source of minstrelsy. To do this we must first examine the place of the comic song in the arena performance, for it was as singers, rather than dancers or instrumentalists that the early performers of what became minstrelsy presented themselves. The art is almost as old as the American circus itself. As early as 1799 there is record of a song being sung in the ring, though it was not comic, nor was it done by the company's clown. It was, in fact, an aberration, as we don't find another singer in the ring until 1817. And we don't see a comic song called that until 1821, this presented by a man dressed as a woman. James West's Circus of that year had two singers on its roster, one comic, one not. In 1823 a Mister Roberts sang a comic song in the program of the Price & Simpson Circus, but it was not until the following year that we find a clown offering comic songs. This was Hugh Lindsay, who



made a distinction in his autobiography between acting the clown and singing comic songs.

From this point, that is from 1824, most circuses had a performer who sang comic songs, and it was almost always the company's clown. The titles of the songs were seldom announced, the usual printed program saying simply, "Comic song by Mr. So-and-so." Nor were comic songs the only ones offered. Female performers increasingly sang in the ring, sometimes in duets with male partners.

I am assuming that you understand I am speak here of the one-ring circus, the forty-foot circle that defined the genre until 1872. In this configuration the audience was very close to the action, and a normal speaking or singing voice was audible to all those present.

As we said, T. D. Rice presented his character Jim Crow in 1829. This was the same year in which the song was sung in the circus. George Nichols of J. Purdy Brown's company was the first to combine the character of the clown with a Negro song; however, he did not do this in blackface until later. In 1831 Brown's circus had in its program what they called a minstrel scene, titled Jim Crow. This is the earliest use we've found of the word minstrel in connection with a circus. Moreover, it may be the first use of it in blackface entertainment. We hesitate to make this claim because our research into the matter is not exhaustive. Hans Nathans believed that the word came from a European singing troupe called the Tyrolean Minstrels who performed in America just prior to the time we speak of. The duos and trios who presented Negro songs all seem to have called themselves Ethiopian Delineators by Extravaganza Singers. Why Brown used the word minstrel we don't know, but suspect it came from George Nichols.

Nichols was a most unusual entertainer. T. Allston Brown in his history of Negro minstrelsy, which ran for two years in the *New York Clipper*, said of him: "George Nichols, the clown, attached for many years to Purdy Brown's Theatre and Circus of the South and West, was also among the first of burnt cork gentry. Nichols was a man of no education, yet he was the author of many anecdotes, stories, verses, etc. He was original. He would compose the verses for his comic songs within ten minutes of the time of his appearance before the audience."

To this point we have made a distinction between comic songs and Negro songs, but in his 1833 advertisements J. Purdy Brown erased the dis-



The sheet music cover of the 1830's song *Zip Coon*. Harvard Theatre Collection.

tinction, announcing as he did that Bob Farrell would sing the comic song *Zip Coon*. This was another of Nichols' compositions, as was *Clare de Kitchen*, which William Creighton sang in the same circus that same month. Both of these songs became staples of minstrel shows, and, interestingly, represented characters from the opposite ends of the Afro-American existence, as seen by white persons.

Zip Coon was a street-wise urban character, whose dress mimicked that of the white dandies of the day, yet was a burlesque of that garb. In the words of Hans Nathan, he was a "Broadway Swell." The tails of his coat were longer, his top hat was larger, his shoes were exaggerated just enough to preserve the style yet miss it. Some interpreters of the personage went so far as to use a lorgnette. The song *Long-Tailed Blue*, popular for many seasons, referred to his swallow-tailed coat. On the stage *Zip Coon* walked back and forth in exaggerated style while singing his autobiography. One verse went: "I sometimes wear mustachers but I lost em todder day for de glue was bad, de wind was high And so dey blowed away."

The other song, *Clare de Kitchen*, was sung by a plantation woman who described sweeping the floor of her Kentucky home in preparation for a songfest. Clare was supposedly dialect for clear. The song was usually sung by a man in woman's clothing.

These two depictions of Afro-American characters, the city dandy

and the plantation worker, were eventually carried over from entr'actes to the order of minstrel shows, in which the first part presented a cast dressed as we described Jim Crow above. The second part, after intermission, was a plantation scene with the performers in ragged clothing, burst shoes, and untamed hair styles. The instrumentation was different as well, the city scene using violins and banjos, the country folks having jawbones and tambourines.

To return to the circus ring, and the progressive use of blackface acts, we find Daniel Gardner, a native of New York City, who began his circus career as an eleven year-old property man at the Mount Pitt Circus in 1827. At twelve he sang songs in the ring, after which he learned to juggle and to walk the slack rope. Somewhere along the line he became a wench dancer, that is, a man who impersonated Negro women. In 1836, at twenty-years of age, he sang and danced as "Miss Dinah Crow," and "Miss Lucy Long," in Green & Waring's Eagle Circus. By 1840 he and William Whitlock were performing on stage in duets, Whitlock as the male banjoist and Gardner as the object of his affections. Gardner reverted to the traditional clown's role by 1842, probably because it paid better, and was steadier employment than wench dancing.

William Donaldson of Poughkeepsie, New York, was another performer who alternated between the clown of the ring and the theatre minstrel. He made his debut in 1836 as "Young Jim Crow," being thirteen-years old at the time, and ten years later was known mainly as a clown.

The facts of circus and theatre employment in the early nineteenth century were that most circus performers had to find work in the winter. Only those at the very top of the profession could expect year-round positions. Of the two genres, the circus with its year-round travelling, was preferred to the short, peripatetic theatre business, where actors spent much of their time unemployed, just as they do today. To be able, as Ethiopian delineators were, to partake of both worlds, was a decided advantage. Once circuses had side-shows, a man who could appear in the ring as a clown, and in the side-show in blackface, was able to command a higher salary. This type of employment was generally possible after mid-century. Still later, after-show concerts, usually olios, or vaudeville, if you prefer, became *de rigueur* in the circus offering, and the blackface singers then moved back

into the big top from the side show.

The Macomber, Welch Menagerie of 1836 advertised that it would present a program of Negro singers in a separate pavilion, the earliest such announcement we have found, though we suspect it was done some years before. A problem we have is that the notices didn't necessarily distinguish between singing as part of the circus program and as an outside attraction.

The words "Minstrel Show," as part of a circus appear in 1837 on the bills of the Lion Theatre Circus. And, strangest of all, J. J. Hall's Boston Circus, in that same year, presented two minstrel scenes on horseback. These were titled *Coa Black Rose*, and *Zip Coon's Visit to Cincinnati*. We haven't the slightest idea why they were presented in this manner, but we do know that later in the century a circus did *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on horseback, perhaps the definitive version of that classic tale.

We can see from what has been drawn here that the stage has been set for the emergence of the true minstrel troupe. The combination of the music, the dancing, the comic patter that enthralled audiences for half a century was about to have its naissance. And that birth took place in the circus ring.

Daniel Decatur Emmett, famed as the author of the song *Dixie*, was a printer in the winter and a circus musician in the summer. He joined the newly formed Cincinnati Circus in 1840. Fortunately for us, Charles J. Rogers was a partner in this little show, a man who was to become a very successful impresario, and therefore whose memories were in demand in later years. He recalled in a letter to the *New York Clipper* in 1874 that Emmett was a member of their orchestra, playing drums. In their travels in West Virginia, Emmett found a man named Ferguson, who was a very accomplished banjo player. Emmett convinced the managers to hire the man. According to Rogers, by the time they reached Lexington, Kentucky in the fall of 1840, Ferguson and the clown, Frank Brower, had perfected what we now call a minstrel act that was "the talk of the town." Brower sang and danced, and Ferguson played the banjo.

Dan Emmett, in the meantime, had learned to play the banjo, and in the season of 1841, became an advertised performer. Brower, full name Francis Marion Brower, introduced "bone playing" in that same year. Ferguson disappeared from the bills about this time, and in the winter of 1842, instead of returning to the printing busi-

ness in Cincinnati, Dan Emmett joined Brower in a show at the Franklin Theatre in New York. Richard Pelham and William Whitlock happened into the boarding house where Emmett and Brower were staying, and the four men began fooling around with their instruments, the bones, a banjo, a violin and a tambourine.

According to the *Clipper*, the four, without a rehearsal, and not really sure of what they were doing, crossed the street to the Bowery Circus, and browbeat Nathan Howes, the circus proprietor, into listening to them. "Boys, you've got a good thing," Howes told them, and then refused to hire them because they wanted ten dollars a week apiece to play in his show.

They then went to Howes' rival, the Welch & Mann Circus, where they were hired and gave the first performance by any minstrel troupe of what came to be the classic type. This occurred February 6, 1843. They were advertised in the *New York Herald* in this way: "First night of the novel, grotesque, original, and surprisingly melodious Ethiopian band, entitled the *Virginia Minstrels*, being an exclusively musical entertainment combining the banjo, violin, bone castanets, and tambourine, and entirely exempt from the vulgarities and other objectionable features which have hitherto characterized negro extravaganzas."

Daniel Decatur Emmett. Harvard Theatre Collection.

From this beginning with Dan Emmett, Dick Pelham, Frank Brower and Billy Whitlock, the minstrel business became an independent genre, the first new popular entertainment. It thrived until the end of the century. For sixty years or more Negro minstrel troupes toured the country, growing in number and sophistication. Standard companies had as many as forty men, gave street parades, built their own theatres in larger cities, and though never approaching the size of the circus audience, were certainly a major component of nineteenth-century professional entertainment.

We wouldn't countenance such performances today, and rightfully so, I believe. There was nothing of value about it beyond the artistry of the individual

performers. It was demeaning and debasing to black people in a way no other ethnic impersonation proved to be. There was some disapproval. A writer to a Montgomery, Alabama, newspaper objected to: "The indecent dress and the coarse actions of the performers, obscene jokes, vulgar songs and dances of men who have debased themselves by assuming and playing the part of Negroes make the [entire ensemble] more disgusting than the orgies of Bacchus."

And another, in an 1836 Norfolk, Virginia newspaper said: "[The circus] would be more respectable, and more profitable if they would eschew frequent exhibitions of black characters. Singing of gross and meretricious songs beclouds the excellence of the equestrianism."

But these objections were few in number, and overwhelmed by public acceptance of the entertainment. For one thing, it was seen as an American form, as opposed to most of the entertainment of the day, which was thought to be European, and therefore "effete."

And absent the racial mockery, we can see that the minstrel shows were entertaining. The music was

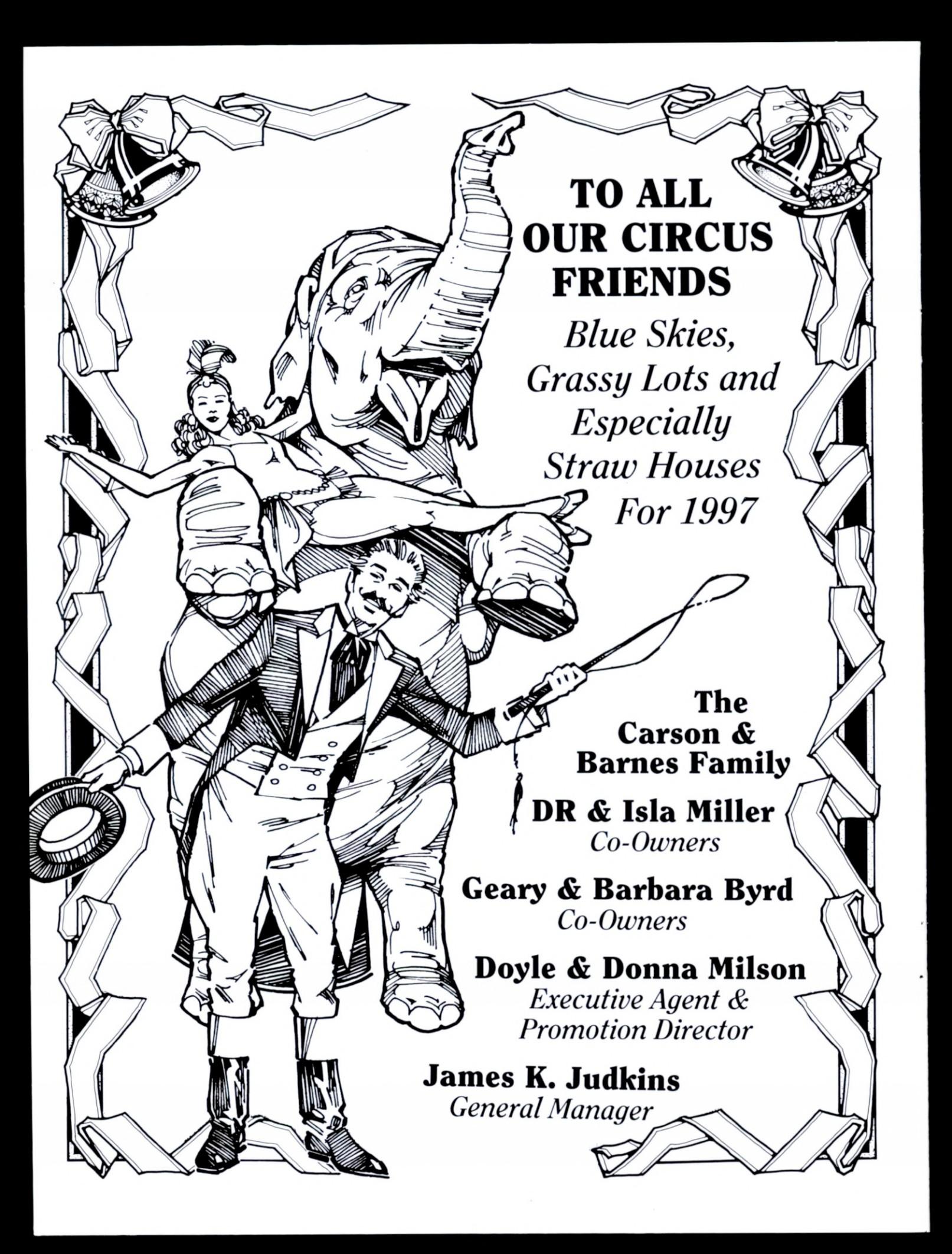
lively and the dances were ingenious, and the comedy was broad and down-to-earth. It glorified humble characters with earthy song and dance. It is said that these shows were the seedbed of jazz music, and it is not difficult to accept that opinion.

Yet over all of it hung that haze of ridicule, that stigma of racism, that makes it seem to us today simply unacceptable. Maya Angelou,

Poet Laureate, has written: "Minstrel shows caricatured every aspect of the black man's life, beginning with his sexuality. They portrayed the black man as devoid of all sensibilities and sensitivities. They minimized and diminished the possibility of familial love."

That was its weakness, but it was half-a-century before it bore the worm that killed it. Essentially, the minstrel show allowed white people to justify their racial feelings. That it originally sprang from the most popular of public entertainment, the circus, which offered no moral attitudes, no political agenda, seems strange indeed.





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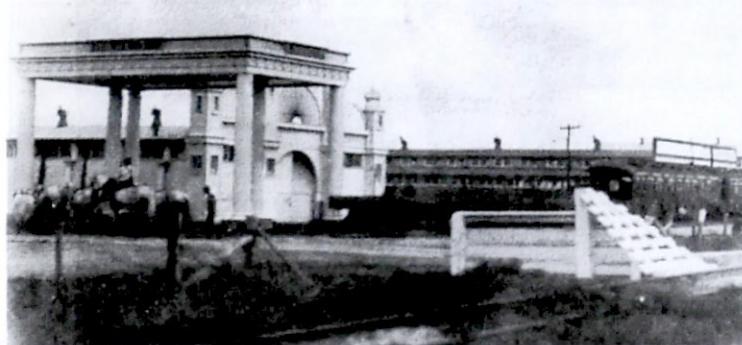
1929

In February Fletcher Smith provided this description of the Christy winter quarters to the *Billboard*: "The winter quarters of the Christy Bros. Shows at South Houston, Texas never fails to attract the attention of those who pass daily enroute either to Galveston or Houston over the new main highway between the two cities. It is located just off the main highway in Dumont, the railroad name for the town of South Houston. It is 12 miles from the city, but can be reached in 35 minutes either by interurban or by the new bus line to Galveston, which passes the very doors of the quarters. These busses run every two hours, leaving from the Sam Houston Hotel, and the fare is 40 cents.

"In describing the quarters I am going to give a word picture, correct in every detail. Since the show came into quarters work has been going on in making still further improvements and it is still in progress. Teams are hauling tons of soil to raise the level of the land around the new elephant building and in building new roads. Let's take a trip through the quarters, starting from the main entrance fronting on the main street. One enters under a beautiful white pillared canopy, a duplicate of the Arch of Triumph in Paris. Just outside the gate is the garage in which is a big auto, a gift to Mrs. Christy from the boss last Christmas. It is in charge of 'Kokomo,' who stands ready all day for immediate action. You are met at the entrance by Joseph McCullum, who transacts all the preliminaries and keeps out all those who have no legitimate business.

"The first building on Tiger Avenue, the name of the main street, is the zoo, a snow-white building 85 by 150 feet with an ornamental iron front of mosaic design. Here in spacious dens are all of the cat animals. Visitors walk

The white pillared canopy at the entrance to winter quarters. Circus World Museum collection.



CHRISTY and His WONDER SHOW

Part Four

By Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

around the three sides on a concrete floor. A short walk and you come to the elephant building, the same size as the zoo. It is steel sheathed. On one side are pens reached by sliding doors from the inside and each morning are turned out the hay animals, ostriches, emus and camels. The front portion of the building is used by the elephants and the rear by the camels, the water buffalo and sacred cattle. Between this building and the training barn is a space that is being transformed into a little lake, lined with stones that were picked up last summer in every state visited by the show on its Western tour. Twelve alligators, purchased at Cuero last fall, will sport about in the lake as soon as the water is turned on.

"The training barn is the largest building in the quarters. It is two stories and steel sheathed. On the ground floor are two rings and around the sides stalls in which are kept the ring stock and the ponies. On the second floor is a commodious sail loft, wardrobe room and storerooms for the props. A short distance down Tiger Avenue and you come to the original building of the quarters. This is the home of the mechanical departments. Here are busy every day woodworkers, blacksmiths, painters and wagon builders. All of the big parade wagons can be stored in the building at one time and they are moved from the repair department directly to the paint shop. At the head of Tiger Avenue is a sizable wooden building used for the storage of the wardrobe, and it is also used by the seamstresses, several of whom are now busy

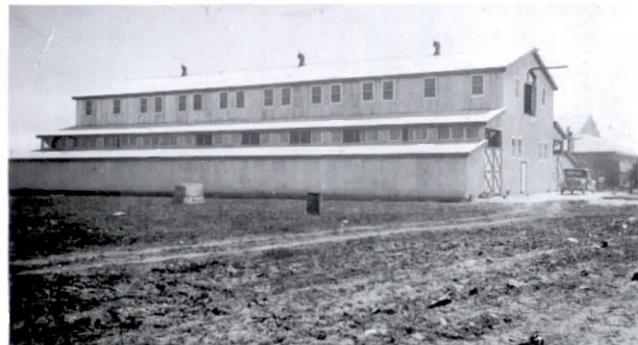
on new wardrobe under the supervision of Mrs. Christy.

"Running parallel with Tiger Avenue is Elephant Street. It, like the former, is of shell construction. On it is located the new dining hall and sleeping quarters for the men. It is a roomy building, 90 feet in length. Half of the building is used for the cookhouse and dining room and the other half for living quarters. There are rooms for the bosses with shower bath, quarters for the white workingmen, also with shower, and a separate apartments for the colored help, who also have a shower bath. There is a reading and writing room. The building is electric lighted and is heated by gas. The next building is a long, steel-sheathed shed used as a hay storage. Here is also the quarters fire department, with a chemical engine. The show has a regular fire department ready for instant service.

"At the front of Tiger Avenue is the handsome white bungalow of the Christys. Although it is roomy and inviting, Mrs. Christy cannot give up the comforts of her private car and the house still remains unoccupied. The past summer the tracks were extended around the rear of the quarters, so that now all of the 45 cars owned by the show are inside the quarters. The streets are lined with palms and an ornamental iron fence forms an enclosure. All of the buildings are painted white and at a distance give the effect of a summer park. G. W. Christy is not yet satisfied, and intends to make still further improvements."

By the end of March work was being rushed both in the training barn and in the workshop. Two baggage wagons and three animal cages were then receiving the finishing touches. The advance car had been repainted and decorated. Christy was greatly pleased over the look of the parade wagons. He was especially enthusiastic over the

The ring stock barn and training building in quarters. Pfening Archives.





The cat animal building with training arenas. Pfening Archives.

work done on the Lion and Mirror bandwagon which had been painted snow white. All the massive animal carvings on the sides and the monster eagle in the front had been done in gold leaf. Reportedly 10,000 leaves of gold had been applied to the wagon, costing \$1,000. The shell band wagon was painted red and gold. Both the America and Asia tableaus had also been gilded.

The new feature, a 100 horse act, was ready. The parade was to have forty chariots, dens and cages. New big top canvas had arrived. Work had been completed on a handsome new main entrance to the quarters. New sleeping quarters for bosses had been occupied.

Western movie star Buck Jones and Al Copeland, a Los Angeles tent and awning man, had visited and looked over circus property for use in an upcoming film to be called *The Bandwagon*. While in Houston Copeland was appointed Western representative for the Christy shows. He supplied the movie industry with performing animals and circus equipment.

Christy Bros. remained on twenty cars for the 1929 season. The big top was a 140 with three 40 and two 50 foot middles. General admission seats were 14 high; the reserves were 11 high. The menagerie top was a wild west canopy 80 wide and 190 feet. Later more canvas was added to make it

The winter quarters wagon building and paint shop. Pfening Archives.



100 by 325 feet. The side show top was 60 foot round with three 30's. The pit show was 30 x 30 feet. Five rings were used, with steel arenas in rings two and four.

The April 6 *Billboard* reported on the opening: "Cameron, Texas. March 30. Christy Bros. Shows opened the season here today with mid-summer weather. Despite the fact that farmers were in the midst of plowing there was a big crowd at the matinee; townsfolk filled the tent at night.

"The circus train left Houston Thursday and arrived here Friday. Both performances went over big and the general consensus of opinion was that the performance this season is whale of a show.

"The opening spec, with all new scen-

imals and in the center eight pits with the rare hay animals, ostriches and reindeer on display. Baby animals were much in evidence, a baby hyena being a novelty, as were the little baby monkeys.

"At 2 o'clock equestrian director Merritt Belew blew the whistle, and from the curtains rolled aside, and from the massive replica of the ark, animals, dancing girls, chorister, Noah and his retinue formed a big ensemble that filled the five rings and hippodrome track, while five prima donnas sang from the backs of elephants.

"Following the spec came a special announcement, and Teddy, the high-wire walking canine, won applause. Then came the big new feature, the 100-horse act presented by Merritt Belew. The air was filled with single traps and rings. In this number were



ery, music and wardrobe, was a big feature. The prima donnas were Mabel James, Grace Brown, Gertrude Duffer, Billie Hopkins, Frances Peasley and Ada May Engard. The new special feature, the 100 horse act, presented by Merritt Belew, went over without a hitch. Other features were the Brocks, the Knight family and a Chinese troupe.

"At the matinee the performance ran for more than two hours, but went over as scheduled at night. Mrs. Christy had the wagon and front door. The marquee was abloom with floral offerings from Houston friends.

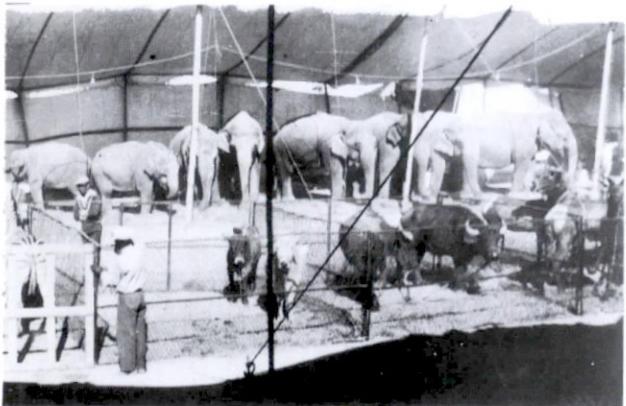
"The street parade was seen and enjoyed by a big crowd. It was the longest ever put on by the show.

"There is: a six pole menagerie, with 20 cages of an-

The giant liberty horse act, a feature of the 1929 performance. Circus World Museum collection.

Bert Dearo, the Knights, Bert Whitler, Grace Twohig, Fay Stokes, Joe Foley, Harry Laverda, Al Goldsberry and Miss Brock doing her revolving traps. Jack Kippell and his funmakers kept the audience amused. A barnyard number was a novelty, with chickens, ducks, geese, pigs, sheep and turkeys in amusing stunts. Following this was a perch act by the Brocks; Bert Dearo, contortionist; Joe Foley, frog contortion; Joe Lindsey, on the trampoline, and Bob Peasley.

"Next was an elephant number that was presented by Gertrude Duffer, Grace Brown, Dolly Ford, Dorothy Campbell, Bernice, Myrtle and Vivian Chapin. Then the iron-jaw number, introducing Mabel James, Miss Whitler, Miss Clark, Frances Peasley and Olive



Elephants and lead stock in canopy covered menagerie in Guelph, Ontario on July 16, 1929. Pfening Archives.

Knight. A big number that filled the air was presented by eighteen young women on swinging ladders and five on swinging perches. Merritt Belew next presented his liberty horse act. The audience received a thrill from the next number, four daring slides by the Chinese troupe and Harry Laverda and the great Goldsberry. Six troupes of dogs were presented by Lola O'Wesney, Fay Stokes, Nita Belew, Miss Hopkins, Fay Johnson and Grace Twohig.

"Elephant acts in three rings were presented by Dorothy Campbell, Gertrude Duffey, and Grace Brown. The five rings next held the pony acts presented by Capt. Joe Stokes, John Twohig, Miss Hopkins, Roy Houser and Merritt Belew. On the track were the hind-leg-walking ponies. The Brock Trio, on the horizontal bars, won much applause, and the acrobatic act of the Knight family was one of the features, especially the double somersault and catch by the youngest member. In the center ring the Chinese troupe did knife throwing, and there was an exhibition of barrel kicking by Joe Lind-

sey. Dorothy Campbell worked the riding leopards in the arena, and riding monkeys and dogs worked in the rings. Santa Claus next appeared and rode around the track, drawn by eight reindeer. Five wire acts followed, presented by the Knights, the Whitlers, Al Goldsberry, Bert Dearo and the Chapin family.

"The high-jumping dogs followed, and the football horses and football elephants went over big. Hair swings and slides by the Chinese acrobats followed and then came the leaping greyhounds. A big feature was the menage act and the dancing horses. The menage riders were Lola O'Wesney, Nita Belew, Gertrude Duffer, Fay Johnson, Frances Peasley, Madeline Meyers, Fay Stokes, Grace Brown, Mabel James, Dorothy Walker, Dolly Ford, Miss Clark, Grace Twohig, Vivian, Myrtle and Bernice Chapin, Viola Burrell, Miss Hopkins, Virginia Peasley, Joe Stokes, John Twohig and Roy Houser.

"Capt. Joe Stokes won applause with the big lion act and the show closed with a pretty hunting number. A wild west concert followed, in which Joe

The Christy lot in Torrington, Connecticut on August 23, 1929. Pfening Archives.



Parade Christy Bros' Circus
Batavia, N.Y. Aug. 30, 1929.

The elephants in a parade in Batavia, New York on July 30, 1929. Pfening Archives.

Clark and wife, the Burrells and Madelene Meyers sharpshooter, appeared. Lou Walton worked the track previous to the opening of the program. The Christy Bros. dancing elephants, Daisy, Babe, Bessie, Dixie and Julie were introduced by the Walkers. Jack Kippell has a good bunch of clowns, including Charlie Nelson, Johnnie Bosler, Lon Walton, William Kempsmith, Pat Shoppe, Marshall Chapin, Al Chapin, Mickie O'Brien, Joe Kildore, Joe Foley and two midgets.

"Fletcher Smith and Ray O'Wesney divided the announcements, and the later has charge of the reserved seats. Henry Emgard was on the side show and making the first opening, assisted on the second ticket box by Joe McCullom.

"The staff and heads of departments included: G. W. Christy, manager; Mrs. G. W. Christy, treasurer; Bert Rutherford, general agent and railroad contractor; Lee Brandon, contracting agent; John T. Warren, general press representative; Fletcher Smith, press agent back with show;



TORRINGTON, CONN.
AUGUST 23RD 1929

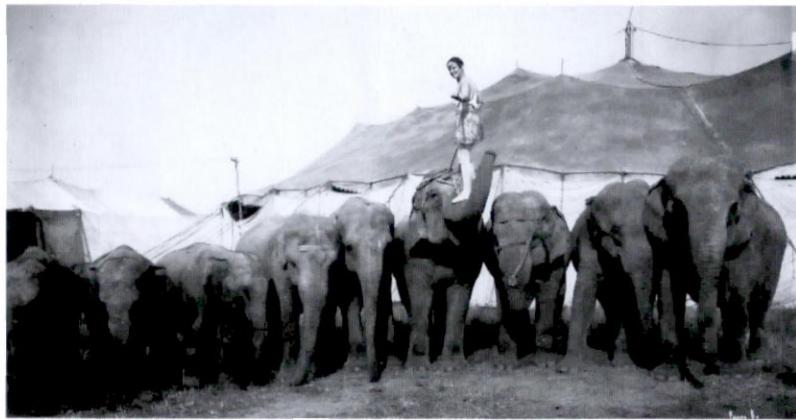
CHRISTY BROS. CIRCUS

PHOTO BY
CENTURY
1929

Merritt Belew, equestrian director; Ray O'Wesney, assistant manager; D. T. Bartlett, legal adjuster; Art Eldridge, general superintendent; Peg Dost, superintendent of stock; Walter McCorkhill, manager of advance car; A. B. Murphy, purchasing agent; Slim Walker, superintendent of elephants; Harry P. Kutz, auditor; Clarence Sheldon, concession manager; Everett James, bandmaster; Professor Deu, side show bandmaster; Henry Emgard, side show manager; Harry Sells, superintendent of canvas; Harry Dalvine, superintendent of lights; Harry Johnson, trainmaster; Jim Sculley, superintendent of ring stock; Jim Williams, superintendent of props; Ray O'Wesney, superintendent of reserve seats; Norman Bain, steward; Dike Ellis, master mechanic; Waxie Dyke, harness maker; Joe Stokes, animal superintendent; Jack Lorenzo, lead stock superintendent of lead stock; Chick Home, pit show and Jack Fenton, advertising banners."

The 1929 route took the show across Texas, New Mexico and California early in the season. Christy went into Oregon at Kalmath Falls on May 13 and then played in Washington and Idaho before going into Montana.

A severe storm struck Christy Bros. at Great Falls, Montana on June 1. There was a long run from Butte and a late arrival. Keeping a constant watch on the threatening clouds George Christy started the performance. When it was about two thirds over he dropped the front side wall and announcers hustled the audience out just in time to prevent any casualties. Five minutes later a terrific storm of wind, hail and rain struck the tents and they all went down. The cookhouse was badly damaged and the workingmen, who were being fed, were bowled over like tenpins as the fierce wind swept away tables and dishes. The show had just put up a new side show banner line and it was blown across the prairie, but the banners were not badly damaged. The big top went down and the crowd inside was drenched, as were the performers. The top was ripped and torn. The side walls of the open-air menagerie withstood the gale and very little damage was done to it. The rain con-



Dorothy Walker and the nine Christy Bros. elephants in 1929. Pfening Archives.

tinued to fall and it was decided not to give a night performance.

The show was loaded and moved to Shelby, Montana, but it was still raining there and the lot was a sea of mud. No performances were given. Since the show was to cross into Canada from there considerable time was saved at the border by not showing. Damage to the tents was repaired at Lethbridge, Alberta.

The Al G. Barnes opposition brigade was in Shelby while the circus train was in town. General agent F. J. Frink and Ben Austin of the American Circus Corporation were in Butte and attended the Christy night performance, witnessing a packed tent. There was no street parade, the city officials refusing to allow the circus to send it through the main streets. There was a good matinee and capacity at night.

Missoula, Montana on Decoration Day would have been big but the train did not arrive until 2 o'clock after a run of 220 miles from Spokane. The city was full of farmers and the tent was filled at the belated matinee.

Cage No. 16, Whiskers, under the menagerie canopy in Canada in 1929. Pfening Archives.



This 1929 Christy train loading order was recorded by Fletcher Smith on May 30 in Missoula:

Car No. 1, 78 foot combination coach and baggage car, all steel, used as advance advertising car.

Car No. 33, 72 foot flat car, all steel with wood decking.

No. 27 Cookhouse steam boiler wagon, 14 feet.

No. 12 Cookhouse range and baggage wagon, 15 feet.

No. 22 "Forepaugh" (Lion and Mirror) shell bandwagon, concessions, 18 feet.

No. 11 Water wagon, 10 feet.

No. 8 Cross cage, 14 monkeys. 8 1/2 feet wide, when loaded crosswise takes up 6 feet.

No. 23, Steam calliope wagon, 15 feet.

Car No. 29, 72 foot foot tunnel car.

No. 29 Columbia bandwagon, side show canvas and props, 22 feet.

No. 30 Asia tableau wagon, menagerie canvas, 19 feet.

No. 31 America bandwagon, small tops and parade trappings, 19 feet.

No. 32 Air calliope wagon, 10 feet.

Car No. 36, 72 foot steel and wood flat car.

No. 71 Steel arenas, chutes, props, 18 feet.

No. 4 Cage, 3 lions, 12 feet.

No. 5 Cage, 5 leopards, 15 feet.

No. 6 Cage, 2 tigers, one panther, one puma, 14 feet.

No. 9 Cage, 5 hyenas, 12 feet.

Car No. 37, 72 foot steel flat.

No. 14 cage, 4 black bears, 13 feet.

No. 13 cage, 4 brown bears, 15 feet.

No. 16 cage, 6 lions, 17 feet.

No. 2 cage, 1 black wolf and 4 wild boars, 13 feet.

No. 3 cage, 2 ostriches and 2 emus, 13 feet.

Car No. 39, 72 foot steel and wood flat car.

No. 16 cage, 1 audad, 1 ski deer, 1 blesbock, 16 feet.

No. 23 cage, 1 giant baboon, 12 feet.

No. 27 Lion tableau, with grandstand seats, 18 feet.

No. 34 Red ticket wagon, 14 feet.

No. 44 Clown tableau, blacksmith shop and harness maker, 10 feet.

Car No. 24, 72 foot wooden flat with steel trusses.

No. 49 Plank wagon, 13 feet.

No. 51 Grandstand jacks, supports and seats, 14 feet.

No. 54 Swan bandwagon, wardrobe and padroom, 18 feet.

No. 56 Auxiliary light plant, 12 feet.

No. 50 Props, trunks, ring curbs, 13 feet.

Car No. 25, 72 foot all steel flat car.

No. 57 Props and ring curbs, 14 feet.

No. 58 Light plant, cables, lights, 16 feet.

No. 63 Big top canvas, 17 feet.

No. 65 Stringers and jacks, 24 feet.

Car No. 26, 72 foot all steel flat car.

No. 67 Pole Wagon, also carried some big top canvas, 37 feet.

No. 7 One hammer stake driver, 10 feet.

No. 86 Plank wagon, 14 feet.

No.- Dove tableau, carried trunks, 14 feet.

Car No. 30, 74 foot Wood and steel flat car.

No. 82 Stake and chain, 14 feet.

No. 97 Palm Tree tableau, band equipment, 16 feet.

No. 5 Mack Truck, open box body, 19 feet.

No. 6 Mack truck, high open box body, 19 feet.

Car No. 44, 74 foot all steel stock elephant car.

9 large and medium Asiatic elephants.

1 saddle horse used by superintendent of elephants.

7 Bactrian camels.

3 Dromedaries.

Car No. 42, 70 foot steel and wood stock car.

32 head of baggage stock.

Car No. 43, 72 foot steel and wood stock car.

30 head of baggage stock.

Car No. 45, 72 foot steel and wood stock car.

16 head of baggage stock.

18 head of ring stock.



Christy Bros. one sheet lithograph used in 1930. Ken Harck collection.

Car No. 46, 76 foot wooden stock car.

20 head of ring stock.

6 Shetland ponies.

4 Goats.

2 Reindeer.

2 Sacred cattle.

4 Zebras.

Car No. 66, 76 foot coach "Houston," half is a pie car and rest working mens' sleeper.

Car No. 70, 78 foot coach "Dallas,"

Ed Kelty photo of the Christy personnel in 1929. The three former Barnum & Bailey tableaus are pictured. Pfening Archives.

workingmens' sleeper.

Car No. 80, 80 foot coach "Beaumont," performers and bandsmen sleeper.

Car No. 81, 80 foot coach "Fort Worth," side show people and bosses of departments sleeper.

Car No. 83, 80 foot "George Washington," three-quarters of this was a sleeper for the ticket sellers, ushers and executives; the other one quarter used as Christy's private car.

The extensive Canadian tour took the Christy circus east through Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. It can be assumed that graft had bolstered the ticket wagon during the western dates in Canada. It re-entered the United States at Niagara Falls, New York on July 27.

Christy wrote: "In July of 1929 Charles Sparks came to visit on my private car in Canada. He offered me \$225,000 cash for my circus. I wanted \$350,000 because it cost me over \$500,000. He left for home from Niagara Falls, Ontario. A month or so later the great depression broke and I wired Sparks to come and get it for \$225,000. He wired back, "Too late," and it sure was. I got little out of that big circus, except for the things I could piece meal out. No one wanted an elephant or anything else in 1930. Thieves looted the railroad cars of bedding, equipment, brass locks broke windows. I finally burned most of the train and sold the scrap for four dollars a ton. My beautiful private car was torn to pieces by thieves for junk."

The transcontinental tour placed the show in New York at Hempstead, Long Island on August 12. A few stands in Connecticut followed before heading south through Pennsylvania and Maryland. On September 13 Christy was in Morgantown, West Virginia. Five stands were played in Kentucky before making a long Sunday



run to Dalton, Georgia, on September 23.

The *Billboard* in August reported Christy had installed another good idea, which he called the rubberneck side wall of the menagerie, which permitted the menagerie canopy to be taken down and packed without interfering with the patrons entering the front door. The side wall was attached to steel cables and was easy to set up. "The European canopy not only does away with the tent and center poles, but is more sanitary and permits the animals to get fresh air and sunlight, and most important of all eliminates obnoxious odors usually associated with menageries," said the paper.

In September personnel changes occurred when Ernie Dameron, the 24 hour man; Frances Peasley; John Two-hig and Jack Harris left the show. Henry Emgard, the side show manager, was succeeded by Jake Friedman, who formerly had the Barnett Bros. side show. Bob Howe, who had the pit show, left. A. B. "Curly" Murray, who had been with the show earlier in the season as purchasing agent and assistant manager of the side show, rejoined as 24 hour man.

The circus remained in Georgia until October 17 when it played Andalus, Alabama. A Sunday run took the Christy train to Thibodeaux, Louisiana on October 22. Texas welcomed the circus in Marshall on November 1.

The closing day was set for November 13 in Freeport, Texas; however, as the November 23 *Billboard* reported: "The Christy Bros. show brought the present season to a close at Bryan, Texas on November 11, two days ahead of schedule, owing to bad weather. The circus was in the rain for two days the previous week and it was raining Monday at Bryan, but cleared up by noon and the show paraded as usual. Walter McCorkhill, who had been sent to Goose Creek, reported that the lot there was under water and it was decided to go no further. In consequence the show train left for South Houston soon after midnight Monday. Business was only fair at at Bryan. Immediately after the night performance everyone was paid off in full and those who desired were allowed to ride the train to Houston.

"The season had been, on the whole, a successful one, and the show had covered more than 19,000 miles, going from winter quarters to the Pacific Coast, back east through Canada and in August was on Long Island. Christy



Mrs. Laura Christy in the ticket wagon. Circus World Museum collection.

had good business on the southern trip, but found Texas in bad shape. The show was put away and no work is to be done until the first of December when every department will be kept busy until spring.

"The show's animal acts will be kept at work all winter and G. W. Christy expects to be busy with them until the opening. The show will be entirely rebuilt this winter, new cars will be purchased and it will take the road in the spring practically new from the front door to the cookhouse."

This was the earliest closing ever for Christy. After black Monday on Wall Street the pickings were slim for circuses.

The home run of 65 miles returned Christy Bros. to Houston over the Missouri Pacific. During the thirty-two weeks of the season the show played 200 cities in 19 states and 4 provinces of Canada.

1930

The start of the new decade found George Christy seriously ill in Houston's Baptist Hospital. By January 6 a report stated he was out of danger and his fever had disappeared, but he remained hospitalized until late January after which he spent two more weeks recuperating in a Houston hotel. He returned to his home on the quarters site the middle of February. His brother Harold was in charge of winter quarters in his absence.

The February 8 *Billboard* included a small advertisement offering a complete 15 car circus for sale. The ad stated, "Dirt cheap, will sell on easy terms." This was the former Lee Bros. Circus. The seller was the Southern Show Equipment Company, an arm's length corporation that relieved Christy of personal liability.

George W. Christy had been one of the most successful circus owners of the 1920s, but he met his Waterloo when

the depression struck the country. His was the first of many well known rail shows to go off the road. The 101 Ranch Wild West, John Robinson, Sparks, Cole Bros. and Sells-Floto shows were casualties in the early years of the depression. Ringling-Barnum stayed on the road until October 10, 1930, but it felt the lack of business in 1931 when it closed the season on September 14, the shortest season in the history of Big Bertha.

As he prepared for the 1930 season Christy ploughed more money into his show. During the winter he bought an all steel elephant car that had been repossessed from the Floyd King ten car Cole Bros. Circus. This replaced one of the older cars.

The twenty-car train consisted of one advance, six steel Mt. Vernon flats, three seventy foot wooden flats, five stock cars and five sleepers. The Noah's Ark spec was dropped after being a feature for many years. A strong performance was planned. New canvas was bought. Without the Noah's Ark spec scenery the seating capacity was increased. The menagerie was again housed in an open air canopy rather than in a menagerie top.

The parade was not slighted. There were 18 cages in the march, including the Whiskers den and six small pony cross cages. The Lion and Mirror, Swan, India and America tableaus went out again.

In retrospect Christy may well have over spent in preparing his circus for the 1930 tour. His shrinking bankroll gave him the shorts early in the season. He was also heavily in debt to a Houston bank.

The January 18 *Billboard* reported that a female camel had been born on New Years Day. The new steel elephant car had arrived. On January 18 the elephant Babe, which had been ill for several weeks, died from blood poisoning. By February Egypt Thompson, assistant manager and general superintendent, had arrived and was in charge of work.

The March 8 *Billboard* reported that the Christy elephants and liberty act worked the Shrine Circus in Galveston. Merritt Belew, who had been equestrian director and horse trainer for Christy, left to join the Sells-Floto show. He was quickly replaced by Rhoda Royal. The Lee Bros. wagons were lined up at the back of the quarters on display to prospective buyers.

According to the March 29 *Billboard* a baby elephant, dog acts, and the thirteen horse liberty act were part of the Shrine circus in Shreveport, Louisiana. Two other animal units were contracted in Houston.

When the circus left quarters all of the wagons were stenciled Southern Show Equipment Co., Inc.

The April 12 *Billboard* told of the opening: "Galveston, Texas, April 5. The Christy Bros. Shows. a 20-car organization, which has been wintering at Houston, Texas, opened here yesterday to capacity business at both shows. Weather conditions were fine. It is almost from sentimental reasons that George W. Christy plays this city every spring, generally as the opening stand, for it was here, 17 years ago, when he first came into Texas with a two-car animal show, which he wintered in the Santa Fe yards along the water front and really made his first start on the road to success. He is the owner of one of the very few big independent circuses of the country.

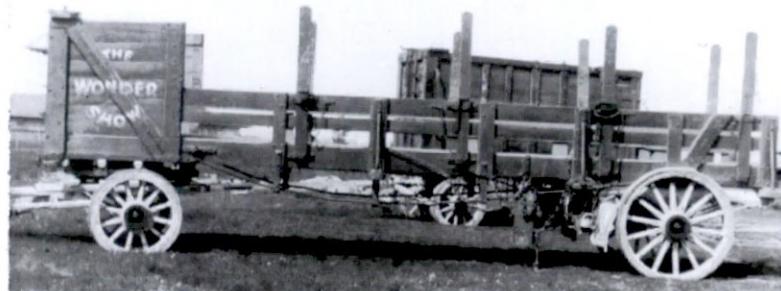
"The show was erected on the old circus lot at 39th Street and Boulevard. The program has been materially changed from former years and gave much better satisfaction. There was a really remarkable exhibition of animal intelligence and some new and novel stunts that stood out strikingly over the other acts.

"The equine display was unusual. There were horses that played football, others, that danced a clog on specially prepared platforms, a big menage number, with the following riders: Carrie Royal, Margaret Thompson, Mabel James, Madeline Meyers, Dolly Ford, Virginia Valentine, Gertrude Thomas, May Norton, Bobby Todd, Dorothy Campbell, Fay James, Myrtle Chapin, Rae Crawford, Lola O'Wesney, Hazel Morgan, Bertha Connors, Bernard Chapin, Bob Norton and John Twohig. A pleasing feature of this was the singing of two numbers by the girls.

"Domestic animals were seen in novel acts, including common house cats that climbed ropes and swung to and fro, a little barnyard rooster that jumped over hurdles and rode a Ferris wheel, a little white poodle that walked a tight wire 30 feet in midair, and a high-wire walking goat. There were eight troupes of trained canines working at one time, and trained zebras, leopards, camels and elephants that did a mean shimmie and went

through interesting evolutions. The big elephant number was presented by Dorothy Campbell Walker and the big elephant mount by Slim Walker. There was an unusually large number of circus acts, wire walkers and aerialists predominating, with seven of the former and eight of the latter working simultaneously. A new feature was Mabel James in her revolving trapeze act.

"The big feature was the appearance of the Knight family of acrobats, who drew a special announcement. Concluding their big act was a thriller as



Big top pole wagon No. 67 was thirty-seven feet in length. Pfening Archives.

Master Paul Knight turned a triple somersault from a springboard to an armchair, held on the shoulders of Dad Knight. It went over to great applause. Another thriller was the appearance of the Li Hung Chin Chinese troupe, presenting sensational hair slides and swings and tumbling. The Connors troupe of wire walkers was another pleasing number. A bunch of Indian performers gave a realistic representation of Indian sports and pastimes, and there was the usual wild west concert. Santa Claus and the reindeer pleased the children, and then there were the clowns, working most of the time on the track and in the rings, making much merriment.

"Many changes have been made both in the executive staff and the performance and the show appears to have never been better or more efficiently officered. Rhoda Royal, the new equestrian director, made his presence in the manner in which the program was run off, with never a hitch. He was assisted by Bob Norton. For the first time in the history of the Christy show, the famous opening spec of Noah and the Ark was discarded, and in its place was a bright, snappy, colorful tournament. There was singing and dancing. All of the wardrobe and trappings were new and the costumes of the ladies were especially becoming.

"The show retained its novelty of last season, the open-air menagerie, in

which were 30 cages and dens of wild beasts, the elephants and camels, and some 60 head of ponies. The cages were under broad canopies.

"W. M. (Egypt) Thompson was kept busy all day when not greeting friends who congratulated him on the splendid appearance of the circus paraphernalia, in seeing to it that everything was moving according to schedule. Jake Friedman had a big lineup in the side show and enjoyed good business. Clarence Shelton had 14 hustling butchers at work and he did a good business. Everyone complimented Everett James on his big show band, and it was the consensus of opinion that it would be a difficult matter to assemble a better 20-piece organization. He played a fine program of the latest popular music previous to the opening performance, as well as standard overtures.

"Mrs. G. W. Christy was in the wagon, as usual, and smilingly handled the crowd without the least trouble. G. W. Christy, with the show in capable hands, had a chance to spend most of his time at the front door, and he was busy receiving friends and congratulations on his recovery from his recent illness and the excellence of the big show performance. Fletcher Smith and Harry P. Kutz were on the front door as in other years and handled plenty of customers at both performances.

"The feature of the morning was the street parade, which left the show grounds, promptly at 11 o'clock, and passed over a three-mile route through the business section. It was by far the longest and most spectacular parade ever presented by Christy, and it evoked many admiring expressions. All of the animal cages were open, and there were twenty of them in line. Everything in the parade looked spick and span. The wardrobe and trappings were all new and the drivers were neatly uniformed. The harness was new and the horses showed no sign of their winter layoff. The show is using an entire new canvas outfit, from the pit show to the cookhouse, and, as usual, the performance was given in five rings. The seating capacity, now that the 'Ark' as been done away with, has been greatly increased, reserved seats now occupying a considerable space on the short side.

"The staff and the heads of departments included. Southern Equipment Company, owner; George W. Christy, manager; Mrs. George W.

Christy, treasurer; W. M. Thompson, assistant manager; W. H. Culp, legal adjuster; Bert Rutherford, general agent; J. C. Rhodes, contracting agent; John T. Warren, general press representative; Fletcher Smith, press agent back with show and official announcer; Walter McCorkhill, advance car manager; A. C. Bradley, 24-hour man; Rhoda Royal, equestrian director; Bob Norton, assistant director; Everett James, bandmaster big show band and mail man and *Billboard* agent; Prof. Deu, side show bandmaster; Jake Friedman, side show manager; Norman Bain, steward; Harry Sells, superintendent of menagerie canvas; Toper Kelly, superintendent side show canvas; Curly Dixon, trainmaster; Charles (Chuck) Connors, superintendent of stock; Jack Morgan, superintendent of lights; Dan Fast, superintendent of ring stock; V. M. Walker, elephant superintendent; Jim Sculley, superintendent of properties; James Snyder, front door superintendent and time-keeper; Harry P. Kutz, superintendent concessions; Clarence Shelton, privilege car superintendent; Ed Heinz, superintendent of sleeping cars; Walter Johnson, master mechanic; Dike Ellis, blacksmith; A. G. Green, advertising banner solicitor; A. B. Murray, purchasing agent."

The show went east, playing Alexandria, Louisiana on April 9 and El Dorado, Arkansas on April 11. After playing Hot Springs, Arkansas the stock cars were taken to Little Rock where the horses were sprayed. Enroute to Russellville the stock was again put through the vats for the final time.

The stock quarantine problems were reviewed in the April 26 *Billboard*: "The Christy Bros. Circus encountered some misfortune the week before last when it lost two consecutive days on account of the strict quarantine in Louisiana and Arkansas, against the 'tick.' The stock was dipped in Houston before the season opened and it was assumed that this was all that would be required. However it was found compulsory to have the stock dipped several times after that. As a result the circus train was two days late in travel and on sidings. The worst was in Orange, Texas where a delay and the stock had to stand around for eight hours. During this time the officials refused to allow the stock to be watered and fed."

After Arkansas Christy played five stands in Oklahoma. Cutting back across Texas it was in Clovis, New Mexico on April 26.

Bad business and bad weather early in the season forced Christy to re-evaluate his situation. He kept pouring money in to keep his circus moving. In Clovis he cut the show in half, sending ten cars back to the barn. Five elephants and eleven camels were sent home. Most of the cages were cut.

Turning north Christy and his nine car circus train went through Colorado, Wyoming, Nebraska, South Dakota and Montana. By the end of June the show had quit parading.

On May 17 the show was in Cheyenne, Wyoming where it ran into a snow storm and business suffered. After struggling through the cold, rain and snow for five weeks the sun finally came out on May 19 at O'Neill, Nebraska.

On May 30 Christy played Sheridan, Wyoming in a 52 a mile-an-hour gale.



The Christy ticket wagon was the only decorated wagon on the show. Pfening Archives.

With difficulty the show got the big top in the air, but it was considerably damaged. The matinee was good, but no parade was given.

Charles Wirth commented in his Sawdust and Spangles column in the May 31 *Billboard*: "Delay of railroads in moving shows has been the cause of a loss in business by many circuses this season, and the Christy Bros. have just reason for complaint regarding the treatment they received while the show was moving over the Union Pacific lines a few weeks ago.

"The show was on the road for ten days, and according to the contract made it was to have a special move for ten cars, paying at the lowest \$442 and

as high as \$513 per move. But the system refused the show a special move, and, it is said, that during the time did not cost the Union Pacific a cent to move the show over its road. It put the circus behind the regular through freights, and got the show in town any time it saw fit. For instance, the show was ready to leave Lexington, Nebraska May 10 at 12:30 in the morning, but having no freight moving after midnight, it held the circus until 6:30 a. m., and put the show behind a local passenger, moving like three cars. On the night of May 12, on a run from Grand Island to Norfolk, Nebraska, the U. P. sent the show out on the local freight leaving the next morning and getting to Norfolk at 11:30 a. m.

"Is it any wonder that the Christy circus has lost matinees due to conditions of this kind? When a show is willing to pay the railroad for a special move, it ought to get there. There are enough unavoidable causes for loss of performances that a show has to contend with throughout the season. It seems to us that when it pays the railroad for service, it ought to get service, and not be subject to these delays. Perhaps that is one of the reasons why some shows are changing to motorized outfits."

While in Hot Springs, South Dakota on June 2 the Christy circus went about their tasks while Harry P. Kutz laid in an undertaking parlor awaiting burial at five o'clock. The entire circus personnel honored him. "Kootie," as he was affectionately known, was popular with everyone,

and his death was mourned by all. He was one of the best known confidential men and accountants in the business and had been with various circuses for more than forty years. He had come to the Christy show when it was enlarged from three cars and had been the right-hand man for Mrs. Christy through all those years, acting as auditor, timekeeper, paying the transportation and in charge of tickets on the front door. He had taken sick at O'Neill, Nebraska, and for several days remained in his stateroom suffering, it is supposed from tomatine poisoning, but later at Valentine another doctor diagnosed his illness as leakage of the heart. He was sent to the hospital at Hot Springs and it was expected that rest would result in recovery when the circus reached there. Soon after his arrival at the hospital

he became unconscious and did not recover. He passed away on May 23.

By May 31 several changes had been made on the advance. Walter McCorkhill, who still managed the advance car, was now doing the advance press work, succeeding John T. Warren.

During week of June 15 Christy twice played two towns in a single day. On June 19 a 1:20 matinee was given in Plentywood, Montana. The train was loaded and left for Bainville, arriving there at 6:20 after a run of 59 miles. The tents were quickly erected and the night performance started at 9 o'clock. The side show opened at 8 p.m. In that part of the country it was daylight until ten at night. The train was behind a wreck on the way to Wolf Point the next day, but arrived in time for the parade to go off the lot at 11:30. After the matinee the train was loaded and left for Glasgow at 4 p.m. The circus arrived in Glasgow around 6:00 and the night performance began at 7:15.

The July 5 *Billboard* reported: "After successfully accomplishing the feat of playing nine towns in one week the Christy show is back to normal again.

"The best town of the last week was Great Falls, Montana on June 21. There was no parade, but a special children's matinee brought out a mob of kids and it was one of the best afternoons of the season. The night show was affected by unfavorable weather. A bad storm came up while the show was in progress and in loading the America tableau wagon was upset at the runs and a horse was buried under it and killed.

"Livingston proved the worst town of the week and Deer Lodge on June 28 was right in line. The show is now in Idaho with Colorado to follow and it will head east. It will in all probability be some time before the Christy show will be seen in the Golden West again."

On July 7 the circus closed suddenly in Greeley, Colorado and returned to quarters. Christy had booked and billed dates through July 20.

The July 19 *Billboard* told the story: "Houston, Texas, July 14. The Christy Bros. Five Ring Wild Animal Show is no more. The train is now resting on a side track out at winter quarters at South Houston.

"The closing was as sudden as a thunder clap out of a clear sky and occurred at Greeley, Colorado last Monday night. Everybody with the show had retired when representatives



The Christy Bros. Circus advance advertising car. Circus World Museum collection.

of the owner came through the two sleepers and notified everybody that the show had closed. Those who were willing to sign an agreement with the owner to accept 25 per cent of their comings were to be allowed to remain on the train, and as Greeley was a long way from Houston or the East everybody without an exception signed.

"The working men who were sleeping under wagons on the flats were not disturbed and their trouble did not come until later.

"The train reached Denver early Tuesday morning and was in Colorado Springs that noon. A run was made to Pueblo, where those who wished could leave the train and were paid the promised 25 per cent. Taking advantage of this offer here were Rhoda Royal and wife, who went to Chicago; Elmer Meyers and wife and the Ross trio of acrobats.

"The train proceeded to Walsenburg, Colorado, where it was halted and the last feed of the trip given to the animals and people.

"From there the train moved on to Amarillo, Texas, where there was a wait of several hours and the stock was turned out to graze and be watered. Just before the train left D. T. Bartlett, who represented G. W. Christy, paid off the workingmen at the caboose and they were left in that city. Many of them caught up with the train again the next morning in Wichita Falls.

"When the train reached Fort Worth, Texas over the Colorado-Southern, it was announced that the folks would be paid off, that is, all those who desired to get off at that point. This announcement was made by Ray O'Wesney, who passed through the train enroute, getting signatures. Most of the band and numerous performers desired to leave here. The train was moved out to the freight yard, three miles from town, but the stock was not fed, nor were the el-

ephants, as it was claimed by the owner that he did not have enough money to even pay for the feed. It was also divulged here that Jack Fenton, who had the advertising banners with the show, was the one who was paying the transportation of the show from this city back to quarters. He left at Rawlins, Wyoming and made a quick trip to New York City, where he wired the show \$1,000 with which to take

it home. Those who desired to leave the show at Fort Worth were paid off there under the supervision of D. T. Bartlett, and instead of the 25 per cent received about 10 per cent of what was coming to them. There was no redress and the train pulled out as soon as the last one was paid.

"This was the last appearance of Bartlett in the paying off, as the rest of the people or those who came to Houston were paid on the train by Mrs. Christy. They were given a portion of what money it was claimed she had left out of the \$1,000 which Fenton sent to the show.

"Everyone with the show was a sufferer. There was first a two weeks' hold back at salary contracted for. Then on the road the show cut salaries in half, and the people worked for three weeks at that cut. Then when the salaries were restored, for two weeks they received none at all, so that at the closing they were out five and a half weeks' salary. Of this money coming some of them, those that left enroute, received 25 per cent, but the rest suffered a greater loss.

"Those who came into winter quarters on the train were W. M. Thompson and wife (Thompson was manager, but had nothing to do with the payoff); Ray O'Wesney and wife; William Culp, assistant legal adjuster; Everett James and his family; Red Shelden, who had the concessions; Bob Norton and wife, and Slim and Dorothy Walker, who are to remain in winter quarters.

"G. W. Christy himself stated on the run that he did not know where he was going to get money to feed the animals and the elephants. Charles Lilenthal, a Houston circus fan, was on hand, however, when the train arrived and he sent out sufficient feed from his store to care for the animals for a time.

"There is no one at quarters now with the exception of G. W. Christy and wife, Harold Christy, Slim and

Dorothy Walker and Charles Nelson, and one or two workingmen to look after the animals. The stock has been turned out to pasture and the elephants allowed to roam about with the camels.

"It was a sad finish for the 'Young Barnum' of the circus business. If his word can be relied upon, and he told the same story to everyone with the show, with the exception of a few who came to quarters, he is in bad shape financially. It was generally supposed that he was worth at least a half million dollars, coming from his first circuses. He had, of course, at this time his shows intact, his animals and the Lee show which is on the side track. The Southern Equipment Company is supposed to be the owner of the circus property and this is in the hands of the First National Bank of Houston.

"Christy hopes to be able to book some of the acts which he owns at fairs and indoor circuses next fall and there are several people who will stick around winter quarters hoping for work in the future. It is claimed that Christy does not own the land on which the winter quarters are situated and that it was purchased on notes. It is right on the highway at South Houston, towards Galveston, and is a valuable piece of property. The buildings were all erected by winter quarters help under the supervision of Harry Johnson, the trainmaster with the show. The material was largely secured from the demolition of the buildings at the Government air port three miles away (Ellington Field).

"Christy states that he did not intend to open the show this season, and had it painted up and ready for the road only to see what the others did and to be in readiness in case he had to go out. His sickness last winter left him but a shattered hulk, and he was not the man who earlier in his career directed the show and made himself the money this last trip has cost him. He must be credited with being game. He gambled everything on the show but his wife's diamonds, and he was able to get it back to quarters intact just because he had with the outfit a loyal bunch of circus folks. He has no plans for the future. It is doubtful if the show ever goes out again. He stated that he will have to sell all his cat animals at once to keep the others alive. He could have kept going, he asserts, and lost more money, but even the banks in Houston refused

him more credit, and it was impossible for him to make a loan from anyone. He has out at South Houston at this time about 30 cars and 20 cages of animals, elephants, camels and horses. His real assets are his six steel flats, a steel elephant car which he bought from the Cole show and his elephants. The animals are of the usual assortment seen with circuses.

"The show opened at Galveston the first of last April, and right off the bat ran into trouble with the Government officials over dipping the animals and for three days it laid on the side tracks. Then it went into Oklahoma and business was nothing. The show was in Oklahoma City over Sunday, and on Monday did not get the locals. Business was so bad that the show was routed into Texas again, and played Amarillo to nothing, at 25 cent prices for children and 50 cents for adults. Then it went into New Mexico and business was even worse. At Clovis it was decided to cut the show in half, and ten cars were sent back to winter quarters. This left the show with only two sleepers, no place for the workingmen or drivers to sleep but the flats, four instead of nine elephants, and three instead of 14 camels. The animal cages were cut and when the show got in it looked like an enlarged three-car outfit. It apparently also made the mistake of playing the same towns in the West it had with the 20-car show, and the public was not slow in noticing the difference. Christy, however, fought against hope, every day being worse than the previous one and he paying good money to keep the show moving. He banked on his Fourth of July date at Rock Springs, Wyoming, and the next day at Rawlins. What was the result? The big celebration of the passing of the Lewis & Clark expedition through that country at Green River took all the people,

The America tableau in front of the winter quarters ring stock building. Pfening Archives.



and the show played the Fourth to less than \$270 for both performances. Rawlins the next day was even worse. Then Jack Fenton was sent posthaste to New York City to help the show out. Christy was down and out, and hoped to get transportation to Hanna, a Union Pacific coal town, on Sunday, but it was a bloomer, and then came the blow off at Greeley, three days behind a rodeo."

Anxious to raise some money Christy placed this ad in the July 26 *Billboard*: "Animals for sale, cheap. Complete circus menagerie, most all trained animals. On account of closing Christy Bros. Circus. 3 camels, 11 lions, 5 leopards, 8 bears, 4 hyenas, one female tiger, black wolf, 3 wild boars, 2 pumas, 2 ostriches, emu, 2 water buffalos, auodad, ski deer, blesbock, giant Russian bear, sacred cattle, zebra, one lot of rhesus monkeys, cockatoos, macaws, giant baboon, trained dogs, twelve horse liberty act and manege horses. Southern Show Equipment Co., South Houston, Texas.

The summer of 1930 was a low point in the life of George Washington Christy. He was about out of cash and had difficulty feeding his stock. William Woodcock, Sr. later stated that the elephants at the South Houston quarters existed on sugar cane stocks, and that two died from malnutrition.

Somehow Christy held on, down but not out. He had assets, the circus and the South Houston land, and he somehow held on to both. He quickly began booking his elephants and liberty horse act on indoor dates.

Christy wrote: "I got mighty little out of that big circus for the few things I could piece out. No one wanted an elephant or anything else in 1930. Thieves looted the railroad cars of bedding, brass locks, the windows were broken."

In the December 20 *Billboard* Christy advertised animals and acts for indoor circuses: "Complete 15 act show. Three baby elephants, ponies, 16 performing horses, dogs, monkeys, goats, acrobats, clowns, etc. With miniature children's menagerie, or full 30 cage menagerie. Go anywhere. Work on stage or ground. Flat salary basis only, no percentage. Open dates in February, March and April. Also now booking fair dates for coming season with this unit."

The last part of this article covering Christy's final years will appear in the next issue.



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Holiday Greetings and Best Wishes

Joe and Marion McKenron

The caption for the photograph on page 40 of the March-April issue (same photo shown below) gave the names of the two African elephants on the 1896 Forepaugh-Sells show as Topsy and Romeo. While that is correct for the female (also sometimes spelled "Topsey"), it is wrong for the male. He was known as Mike. According to Bill Woodcock's elephant records, there was a "Romeo" on the 1896 Forepaugh-Sells circus, but it was a female Asian.

In addition to the name error, the 1896 date is suspect. The photo was taken by F. W. Glasier of Brockton, Massachusetts, and it was most likely shot while the Forepaugh-Sells show was either there or in the general vicinity. In 1896 that circus got no closer to Massachusetts than Ohio. However, it did play Brockton in 1897, 1900, and 1901 and at other Massachusetts towns in 1899, 1902, 1904, and 1907. And, Mike and Topsy were there in all of those years. So, take your pick!

Next to Jumbo and Alice who never toured together in America while both were alive, Mike and Topsy were probably the best known and most photographed pair of African elephants in American circus history. They were fixtures on the Sells Brothers and later Forepaugh-Sells circuses where they were shown together for almost thirty years.

We do not know for sure just when the Sells brothers acquired Mike and Topsy, but it was about 1878 or 1879. They were two of a group of six African elephants that had been accumulated by that circus in 1887. We know there were that many because the Sells ran an ad in *Clipper* (12/24/1887, p. 663) offering six Africans for sale, three of which were described as very large. As far as is known, that was the largest number of Africans with any circus up until the Toby Tyler show of the mid-1980s.

Though African elephants have always vastly outnumbered Asians in their respective native lands, the former were never domesticated like the latter and thus not as easily obtained. That partly explains why, historically, Africans have been much rarer in circuses, a situation which has changed only in recent years. Other factors, however, have

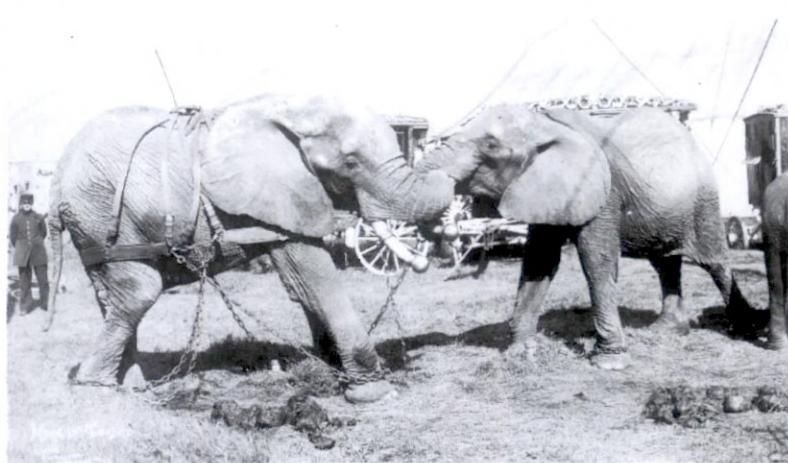
AFRICAN ELEPHANTS ON FOREPAUGH-SELLS IN 1896 A CORRECTION AND SUPPLEMENT

Richard J. Reynolds, III

caused showmen to prefer Asians.

African elephants are no less intelligent than Asians. In fact the late elephant trainer Allen Campbell, who was tragically killed by an African in 1994, once told me he considered the African the smarter of the two. But, Africans are vastly different in temperament, a trait which the old time bull men mistook for stupidity and stubbornness, making them untrainable. Time tested techniques for breaking, training, and handling Asians simply did not work for Africans. Typical of the old timers' attitude toward the species was the statement of Joseph Beatty, Forepaugh-Sells' elephant superintendent, in a June 14, 1896 interview with a reporter for the Topeka (Kansas) *State Journal*. (It and all the extraordinarily detailed coverage that newspaper devoted to the 1896 Forepaugh-Sells circus--perhaps as thorough as has ever been written about a circus anywhere--was quoted in its entirety by Orin King in his wonderful piece in the March-April issue for which the aforesaid African elephant photo served as an illustration.) Referring to Mike and Topsy, bull man Beatty stated: "We have only two Af-

Topsy and Mike on Adam Forepaugh & Sells Bros. Circus. Glasier photo from the Ringling Circus Museum, Sarasota, Florida.



rican elephants. They are wild and difficult to teach and are altogether very unsatisfactory."

Aside from temperamental differences, Africans have not been as hearty in captivity. In fact, not one of them has yet lasted fifty years in a zoo or circus, either here or abroad! By contrast, Asians rather easily make the half century mark. That will likely change, however, because much more is now known

about the nutritional and psychological needs of African elephants, and presently at least six of them have been in captivity over forty years.

By the 1870s young African elephants were coming on the market with increasing frequency as the German dealers began tapping the vast animal treasures of sub-Saharan Africa. From 1873 to 1878 the Central Park Zoo received no less than nine such elephants. Most were probably destined for circuses because dealers regularly used that zoo to temporarily house animals headed elsewhere.

Nineteenth century American showmen jumped at the opportunity to get these novel elephants whose differences, vis-a-vis Asians, were probably not yet fully appreciated when they first started turning up in fair numbers. Bill Johnston (*Bandwagon*, May-June, 1992) reported that two were on tour with circuses between 1867 and 1869 (with a Hitchcock-Cushing outfit and the Dan Castello circus) and that another was with the 1875 American Racing Association. Cooper & Bailey is said to have had at least two Africans in 1879, and early that same year the Barnum circus received four small ones (*Clipper*, 3/29/1879, p. 7). As is well known, Barnum & London got the mighty Jumbo in 1882 followed in 1886 (the year after his death) by his London zoo bride, the African Alice.

John Robinson also had one or two around that time. And, as noted above, by 1887 the Sells brothers had accumulated six of them.

All of this stands in stark contrast with the first half of the present century when African elephants were exceedingly rare circus animals. There were two primary reasons for this: (1) World War I destroyed the German animal trade with east Africa, and it had just

begun to redevelop when the Great Depression, followed immediately by World War II, set it back again, and (2) based on earlier poor experiences in trying to make Asian elephant husbandry work with Africans, circus men had come to greatly prefer Asians which were readily available anyway.

The accompanying photograph of Mike and Topsy on Forepaugh-Sells is thought to have been taken in 1907, and that was the last tour they made together. At the end of that season the Ringlings decided to shelf that circus, dividing its properties and animals between their namesake outfit and the Barnum show which they had just acquired. Mike and Topsy turned up in Bridgeport where Mike lived for only a short time. He died there on December 19, 1907, before he could go on tour with the Greatest Show On Earth.

After her mate's demise, Topsy continued to tour. She was still with Bar-



African elephants Mike and Topsy being unloaded from a Forepaugh-Sells elephant car. Glasier photo from the Ringling Circus Museum Sarasota, Florida.

num & Bailey in 1909 because she was photographed with it twice that season, at Mason City, Iowa on July 18th and again at Battle Creek, Michigan on August 4th. That, however, is the last

trace of her, and it would be fair to suppose that she died within a year or so thereafter.

Topsy logged some thirty-one years on tour in America. That is the record for troup ing by a circus African elephant in this country. Having so stated, we should point out that Gunther Gebel Williams' African female, Kongo, has been in captivity longer. However, not all of her time has been logged in America. Kongo first spent some fourteen years in Germany and Europe with Circus Williams before coming here in

1968 for the new Ringling Red Unit where she was a fixture for twenty-seven seasons until her retirement at the conclusion of the 1995 season. At last report, she was living at the Williston, Florida circus animal farm. Kongo has now been in captivity for more than forty years. Who knows, she may have even more years ahead of her as a retiree.

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A Midnight Swim

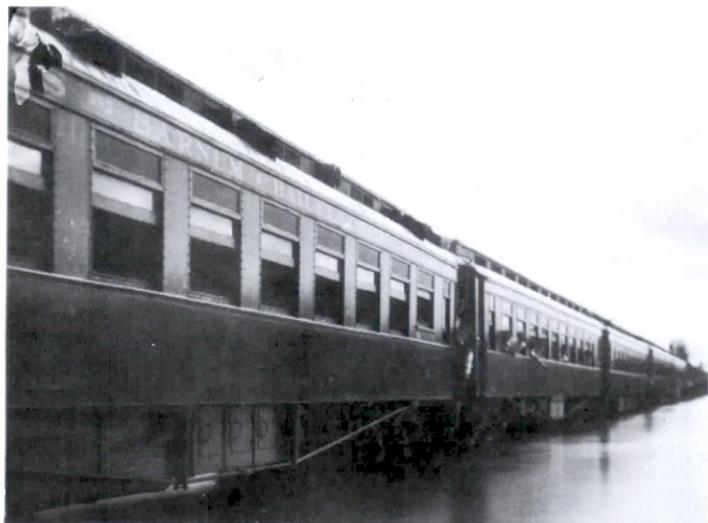
The Ringling-Barnum circus had finished a profitable 1919 season. The last stand was Savannah, Georgia the latter part of October. I was working in the pie car or dining car for Joe Dan Miller on the home run to winterquarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

In those years the railroad commission was not as strict on safety as they are today. It was impossible to walk from one sleeping coach to another in those days. If you wanted to go to another car you had to wait until the train stopped, then hope you could make it to the car before the train started. It was almost a daily occurrence for someone to miss the train trying get from the pie car to his sleeper.

The first night out of Savannah we had closed the pie car around two In the morning. The platform of the car was jammed with men waiting for the train to stop so they could get to their coach.

The train finally stopped about two hours later. There was a mad scramble by everyone to reach his coach before the train started again. It was pitch black and you could not see your hand in front of you. I was running along side of the train when the engineer gave the go-head signal. Then I really started to run, trying to reach any platform on the sleepers. All of a sudden I was flying through the air, not with the greatest of ease. The next thing I knew I was hitting water. I was stunned for a moment. Then I started to wade toward the bank. After reaching dry land I looked up and could make out a trestle with the circus train stopped on it. Some of the men

The Ringling-Barnum Circus sleepers in 1919. Pfening Archives.



THE CIRCUS STEWARD

PART XI

By John M. Staley

were shouting, others had flashlights trying to locate me. After shaking myself of the water I climbed the embankment and hurried to my sleeper. I heard the engineer give the all clear signal and the train started. By that time I was out of my wet clothes, and so to bed.

I found out later that Joe Mud and Ray Milton of the train crew were sitting on the platform of their car and had heard my scream and splash in the water. One of them pulled the emergency cord and stopped the train.

Mr. John and His Dinner by Coleman Lamp

We were showing Decoration Day 1923 in Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was a nice and clear day, the sun out in all its glory. There were plenty of old timers from the Barnum show visiting with friends. Mr. Charles had finished his dinner and I was about ready to drop the top when Mr. John's private chauffeur from New York City drove up and gave me the bad news that Mr. John and a party would be over in about thirty minutes for dinner. So before I started to put the tent back in shape I located Ollie Webb, the cook house steward, and told him the bad news. He was fit to be tied as most of the wagons were about loaded just waiting for the canvas to drop.

The wood ranges had been dumped and loaded into the wagon. So they had to unload one range, get a fire started and wait to find out what the guests were going to eat. Everything came to a

sudden halt as not one wagon could be loaded and sent to the train. My equipment for the dining tent was pieced out over the eight wagons. Mr. John and his party did not arrive until over an hour later. It was already getting dark. By then there no electricity for the cookhouse. But I had my trusty Coleman lantern go-

ing full force. The party had porterhouse steaks that night. They must have weighed about three pounds each. I have forgotten exactly what went with dinner. I know they had soup, steak, salad, one or two vegetables, dessert, coffee and Sanka for

Mr. John. They sat and drank and talked. It seemed like they never would leave. It was around ten o'clock when I helped Mr. John with his coat and brushed his hat. The menagerie had been torn down, loaded and was on the way to the train. Normally the Squadron was loaded and ready to leave town around ten o'clock.

The Moonlighter

The Ringling-Barnum circus had given an afternoon only performance on September 25, 1922 in Amarillo, Texas. It then made a long jump into Wichita Falls. At that time the oil boom had had no effect on the small town of Wichita Falls. That was to come in later years.

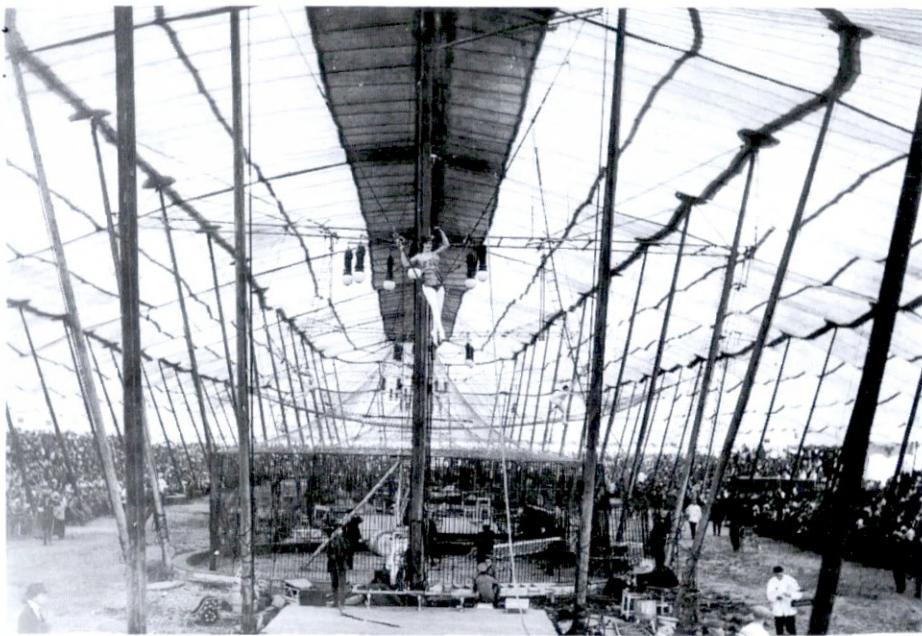
Ollie Webb, the cook house steward, did all his meat ordering through a large meat packer in Chicago.

The circus train did not get into Wichita Falls until after noon. Webb and I got off the train as soon as it stopped in the railroad yards. I called a taxi cab and directed the driver to take us to the wholesale section. I was sent to the branch meat house to get the meat and provisions that had been ordered out of Chicago.

The branch house consisted of a railroad reefer or I should say insulated box car that was refrigerated sitting on a dead end of one of the tracks. They had put up a two by four office adjoining the meat car with a door through the end. The branch house was closed.

I grabbed a cab back to the circus grounds and told Mr. Webb about the problem. He was fit to be tied. He sent me back down town to try to locate the meat agent. I found out his name and looked it up in the telephone book. I called but no one answered. I then checked around some of the restaurants and finally found someone who could help. He told me that the branch office closed one day a week and that the agent was always out of town on that day. His day off happened to be circus day. Then I hit pay dirt. I learned he would put meat and provisions needed that day in the local ice house and anyone that had ordered could pick up their supplies there.

I had the cab take me to the ice house and sure enough our supplies



were all there. I hired a dray to take the food to the circus grounds.

It was dark when we served dinner and much later when we got to the train. But it was not too dark for Webb to let out his wrath about the meat mixup. He sent me to town with a red hot telegram to the meat packer in Chicago telling them what had occurred.

We were later told by a salesman that the agent had been removed from the payroll. He was the local bootlegger and had forgotten about the circus coming to town on his day off.

Serving the First Lady

The Ringling-Barnum Circus was showing at the old Camp Meigs site on Florida Avenue in Washington D. C., April 30 to May 2, 1923. At the time I was private waiter for the Ringling clan. It was in the early afternoon, the matinee performance of the circus not having started. I was cat-napping in one of the canvas folding chairs inside the private dining tent.

Someone rapped on the screen door and called my name. I opened the door and asked what was so important to awaken me out of a good snooze. Leo Crook, the boss candy butcher, had sent over one of his men asking if I would get him out of a jackpot. They needed my help with President Harding's wife and party who were in the big top. I said I would be glad to help and would be over as soon as I got the sleep out of my eyes.

In all the years that I was private waiter and also steward on the yacht *Symphonia* I always changed my white shirt at least twice a day. So I changed my shirt, put on a black bow

The inside of the Ringling-Barnum big top as seen by Mrs. Harding in 1923. Pfening Archives.

tie, a white starched coat with frogs [epaulettes], a white skull cap, worn at a jaunty angle, and was on my way to meet the first lady.

When I arrived at the candy stands Leo explained what was needed to serve Mrs. Harding and her party. By the time I arrived the performance had already started. So before taking anything into the big top I took a quick glimpse inside to get my bearings.

On my first trip I had palm leaf fans and programs. Later I served lemonade, peanuts, Cracker Jacks and old fashion ice cream which was running down the side of the cones. I refilled the pitcher of lemonade on each visit to their section.

It was a scorching hot day for the last part of April. At that time the circus was not equipped with rotating electric fans or air conditioning. The circus management had reserved the first fifteen rows of chairs in the center section of the grandstand. There must have been twenty to thirty chairs in each row. Behind the fifteenth row were row after row of secret service men. For that matter they were scattered all through the circus tent, even outside of the performers entrance where the party entered and would depart.

My first trip with the fans and programs was a cinch. John Ringling was sitting in about the fifth row. Mrs. Harding and her party were seated directly behind Mr. John. He was the only man present. Upon reaching the party I went directly to Mr. Ringling, asking

him what he would like for me to serve. He introduced me to Mrs. Harding telling her my name was "Johnnie," and that I was his waiter on the circus grounds.

I later found out that the President and Mrs. Harding, along with dignitaries and their wives, had planned the circus party. Something important must have occurred as the president had to cancel at the last minute.

For once in my life I really had stage fright. As I entered the big top the performance was going full blast. All the seats were filled with people trying to see everything going on in the rings and stages at one time. Photographers and news cameramen were clicking at everything and everywhere. I had my tray loaded with glasses and pitchers filled with lemonade, balancing the tray with three fingers of my right hand, shoulder high. By the time I reached the special section my knees were knocking so hard my feet did not know which way to go. After what seemed like ages I made a table by placing two folding chairs back to back.

After that first trip I had the rest of the day made.

The afternoon went off without a hitch. But I was glad to get back to my little ole tent, away from all the hustle and bustle of the circus performance.

President Harding died on August 2, 1923 while the circus was exhibiting in Canada. John Ringling sent word to cancel the afternoon performance on the day of the President's funeral in respect for the deceased.

Abie, The Boy Wizard From Nebraska

It was the last winter in the old Barnum winter quarters in Bridgeport for the Ringling-Barnum Circus. I was in charge of the mess hall under steward Joe Dan Miller. I had a Jewish boy working for me by the name of Abraham Tavlinsky from Lincoln, Nebraska. Abie was a young kid full of pep and vim. I believe at times he put on a false front of being happy go lucky to keep from being homesick.

One morning we were putting prunes in deep dishes on the working men's tables. They had been left over from breakfast and the chef wanted them used up. To this day I really don't know how the prune fight started. I do know I was in the middle of it and that prunes were over all the walls and tables. Abie was one of the main players. At the height of the melee Joe Dan walked into the dining room. With his appearance everything came to a stand still. You could have heard a pin drop on the wood floor it

was so quiet. Joe Dan did not say anything to me in front of the crew. Later, alone, he sure gave me a darn good tongue lashing that I have never forgotten. His words helped me in later years when I became a cook house steward.

Another time that winter Abie and I started to wrestle in the kitchen. He got serious and was pummeling me all over the floor. At long last I broke his grip. Abie jumped up and ran across the mess hall to a door that led up to my sleeping quarters. Above the door there was an opening the width of the door frame and about eighteen inches deep. As I started out of the kitchen I picked up a meat cleaver that was on top of the butcher block. As Abie was closing the door I threw the cleaver into the opening. It was almost a perfect throw. It hit one side of the opening a glancing blow, dropping inside the door on the floor. Thank God Abie did not stop and stand behind the door. He had gone up the stairs. We were both scared of what could have happened. There was no more tomfoolery after that. We have been good friends throughout our years in show business.

In later years he was a whiz as a candy butcher and had the program concession on the big show. He became a top notch promoter and was co-owner of Cole Bros. Circus in 1949. Abie was a very bright and successful business executive. He was later the owner of most of the large display signs around Times Square, as well signs in the New York subways.

His name today: Jack Tavlin.

Happy New Year

The Greatest Show on Earth was on its homeward trek to winter quarters in Sarasota, Florida as the 1928 season was drawing to a close. The circus had entered the state of Florida. We must have been playing Jacksonville. I was getting some shut eye between meals when I was awakened and told the "old man" wanted me at his office tent. When I entered Ollie Webb's tent the baker and the chef were already waiting for whatever was to break. It was unusual for Webb to corral us at that time of day.

Webb then told us that he had been doing some deep thinking about a proposition that the Malone brothers of Miami had offered him to work at the Breakers Hotel during the winter.

After filling us in on the deal he then asked If we would like to spend the winter on Miami Beach. We would be furnished board and room and would be better paid than on the circus.



Jack Tavlin, at right, general manager of Cole Bros. Circus in 1949. Pfening Archives.

George Bood, the baker, was to round up two or three men for the bakery. Herman, the chef, would need three or four men for the kitchen. I was to get ten good men for dishwashers, pot washers, cleaners for the night club and bus boys for the coffee shop.

Webb, Blood and I were driven to Miami in one of the Malone's cars. The rest of the crew were sent by bus. Arriving at the hotel's Roman Pools we were greeted by some of the disaster from a hurricane that had recently passed through Miami. The night club, kitchen, coffee shop, and baker's and butcher's shops were under a foot or more of sand that had been washed in from the ocean.

The chef dug up food for the crew. In the meantime, while some of the men started on the sand detail, others were getting the bunk house set up over the baker's shop. I put my trademark on the front side which had two windows. I later had it paneled into a bachelor's apartment.

All we did the first month was clean the joint from one end to the other. Webb opened the night club on Christmas eve. It had Aaronson and his Commanders, a society orchestra from New York City, playing. Around the orchestra Webb built a star studded show with a big name entertainer every two or three weeks. The gambling casino also opened the same night.

On Christmas day we started to advertise the big New Year's party. Reservations soon started to pour in. In a few days there was standing room only. Webb was buying provisions like mad. Food was being stored any place that seemed vacant. The fresh frying chick-

ens did not arrive until the last minute. They were stacked to the ceiling in iced boxes in the butcher shop.

The morning came for the big, big day that we had been awaiting. It started to rain early that morning. A cold wind picked up as the day progressed. It was getting colder by the minute. By noon the rain was coming down in torrents. The wind also picked up speed. Toward evening the cancellations started to pour in. We all knew by then that the New Year's party would be a flop.

When the orchestra came upon the stage there were not twelve people at the tables. When the New Year strolled in there might have been twenty five to thirty hardy souls at ringside who had ventured out into the cold rainy night. Upstairs the gambling tables were bare of players.

The first show came to a speedy end. The bandsmen had started to pack up their instruments. Some of the performers were in street clothes, ready to go back to the hotel. Someone must have told Webb that the show was over and everyone was going home. He came into the club with fire in his eyes. He singled out Aaronson, the orchestra leader, and told him in few words that his contract called for two complete shows as well as music for dancing. He said he was holding Aaronson responsible for the two shows and that they would be put on in their entirety. He then went to the show producer and repeated the same. With that Webb returned to his office. The producer went to notify the performers that there would be a 2 a. m. show. The band boys started to unpack their instruments to play for dancing.

The second show started on time, right on the button at 2:00 a. m. This time they had a much bigger audience. All the men employed upstairs at the gambling tables had been invited, as well as the kitchen help and the girls in the coffee shop. Also on hand were any other persons working at the Roman pools who were crazy enough to be up at that hour.

The band and performers really put on a great show, putting in extra licks as they had a captive audience consisting of all the employees and a few paying customers that dreary, yawning morning.

I have kept the best part until last. Starting on New Year's day and until all those boxes of chickens had been consumed we had chicken in so many ways, some not in the book. I never knew there were so so many ways of fixing chicken. To this day I am not overly fond of chicken.

Never Gossip Around the Circus

The Ringling-Barnum Circus was showing in Fresno, California around the first part of September, 1922. Dinner in the cookhouse was about over when lo and behold the staff car drove up. Mrs. Mabel Ringling stepped out of the car and walked into the private dining tent and had her dinner. Toward the end of her meal, out of a clear sky she said, "Johnnie do you know if my brother-in-law Charles is teaching a certain girl on the circus to drive his Pierce-Arrow over the highway after the night performance." I did not answer at once, then replied I did not know. After all, I was steward on the Charles Ringling yacht in Florida during the winter months and had to be neutral.

Old Home Week in Chicago

After a while I dreaded the thought of the long stay in Chicago which varied from nine days to fourteen days from 1919 until 1934. Ringling-Barnum exhibited on the lake front in Grant Park. The first years we showed they were filling in the lake front, pumping it from Lake Michigan. The flies and mosquitos were awful after two or three days. Chicago is not the coolest city in late July or early August. For the Ringling clan it was old home week when the circus hit Chicago. They would put a wood floor in the private dining tent. Each day it was like being in Grand Central Station. We very seldomly had anybody for lunch, but had to put on skates for dinner. To this day I do not know how they timed their meal hour. A person never had to wait. The early birds would be Mr. And Mrs. Charles Ringling. Sometimes they would bring friends. Then came the Robert Ringlings, the Richard T. Ringlings, the Ida Norths, the Lancasters and bringing up the night cap would be the John Ringlings. Some days there might not be anyone, but the next day they all might come in. Dinner lasted from 3:30 until after the performance around 5:00 o'clock.

Gasparilla Day at the Fair

The highlight of the Florida State Fair each year in Tampa was Gasparilla day. Each year at fair citizens who impersonated Jose Gaspar and his band of pirates invaded the city amid booming guns, cannons and flying flags, with hundreds of boats of all sizes and shapes.

The real Jose Gaspar was a pirate, one of the last to sail the Spanish main, who plied the west coast of Florida until his luck ran out. Gasparilla day set off a whole week of parades



John and Mable Ringling. Pfening Archives

and social activities. It was the zenith of the winter season's social whirl.

During the early twenties Mrs. Charles Ringling always planned a trip to Tampa to take in the fair and witness Gaspar invade the city.

So it was no surprise when one Sunday afternoon George, the chauffeur, drove down to the dock and relayed the message that had been given to him by Mrs. Ringling. I was to tell the Captain that the Ringlings and their guests would come aboard early that evening and would like to get under way as early Monday morning as was possible. I also told the cook they would have dinner aboard around eight on Sunday night. Coming aboard were Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ringling, their son Robert, his wife, their daughter Hester and her husband, as well as Mr. and Mrs. Jordan and their son, who had been

The Ringling-Barnum Circus in Soldier's Field in Chicago in 1936. Pfening Archives

personal friends of the family for many years. As soon as the party was aboard George headed the Pierce-Arrow toward Tampa to meet the yacht the next day.

Daylight was just breaking in the East as the sailors cast off the ropes and headed toward Tampa. On the way up the sailors dressed up the ship with pennants and flags from one end of the yacht to the other.

Arriving in Tampa just before noon the Captain docked the *Symphonia* at the old Tampa Bay Hotel dock, which is now the University of Tampa. We were not too early as the river was full of pleasure boats and folks were finding the best spots to watch the pirate ship as it entered the harbor.

A few minutes before the *Gasparilla* entered the last bridge, which was then the Lafayette Street bridge, a group of pirates came over to the dock and told me that the yacht had to be moved, and right now, as we occupied the space that had been allotted the *Gasparilla* ship. At first I thought they were kidding. Finding they were serious I at once located Mr. Charles and told him the bad news. He at once went to the gang plank and invited the pirates aboard. They explained their mission, telling him the same as they told me except in a softer tone. Mr. Ringling told them that he was very sorry but that he had contracted dockage space from the Tampa Bay Hotel weeks before the fair. He realized someone had made a big boo-boo. He said he would like to go along with the men, but he was not going to move his yacht. It was going to stay tied in the berth until he was ready to return to Sarasota, but they could come along side and his crew would help with their lines, tying the two ships side by side. The pirates could use the yacht's deck to reach shore. But it would only be temporary and they would have to find another docking space. They did not like the arrangement, but had no other choice at this late time and so they agreed.



Mr. Ringling told me to tell the Captain to have his sailors to stand by with canvas fenders to avoid scrapping the side of the yacht when the three masted *Gasparilla* came along side.

As the good ship *Gasparilla* approached the pirates aboard were shooting off cannons and hand guns. Others were strolling the deck with whiskey bottles in their hands. The crow's nest was crowded with ferocious looking pirates. They had dummies hanging from the riggings and masts. There must have been some real sailors aboard as they knew how to throw heaving lines to our yacht. They were then pulled to each end and then made fast on the dock. After everything had been made fast the pirates crawled over the railings onto the yacht, across the deck and then ashore. As they came aboard the pirates were shooting off their pistols and waving their cutlasses. They wended their way through Plant Park and into the fair grounds to get ready for the mammoth street parade.

Tourist and folks from all over Florida were on hand to see this great three hour parade and to witness Jose

Gaspar capture the city and take the keys to Tampa from the mayor. Later an elaborate coronation ball was held for the new king and queen for that year.

That evening Robert Ringling had an engagement to sing at the Ybor Club in Ybor City, a community east of Tampa. Robert was a singer of note, having just finished a concert tour of Florida. He was known as the silver voice tenor.

The Cookhouse Mascot

We were playing a week's stand in Brooklyn at Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues in 1933 or 1934. In those years the pig farmers from Jersey City would pick up all our garbage from the cook house to feed their pigs. On one visit they gave the cook house a baby pig. He was adopted as the cookhouse mascot and was named Mike. I had our stake and chain man make a cage for Mr. Mike.

By the end of the Brooklyn stand Mike was getting acclimated to his surroundings. He was the last thing loaded on No. 8, the canvas and pole wagon. After the poles were loaded Mike's cage would be put on top of the poles and lashed down securely so that it would

not fall off the wagon on the train. The next morning in a new town Mike's cage would be the first thing unloaded from No. 8 wagon. He would make a beeline for the kitchen and food. Everybody fed Mike and made a big fuss over him. He would never venture too far away from the cook house. After a while he became a good watch dog and sure liked to chase any stray dog or cat from the cook area.

We got Mike in May. By the time we got to Chicago in the first part of August Mike was getting too big for his own good. As a baby he would run under the tables with the greatest of ease.

Now if he tried to run under the tables they would come tumbling down. He was also mean to some folks who did not treat him well.

So it was decided to give him to Herbert Weaver, the commissary man, who had a home in Batavia, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. One night a pick up truck came to the cook house and took Mr. Mike away. The men who knew and loved Mike were misty eyed for weeks, perhaps a month. None were ashamed.

FAMOUS COLE
INDOOR VARIETY
CIRCUS

Christmas & Happy
New Year

From
Elida Entertainment Inc.
Ron & Willene Bacon
Larry & Cheryl Allmon

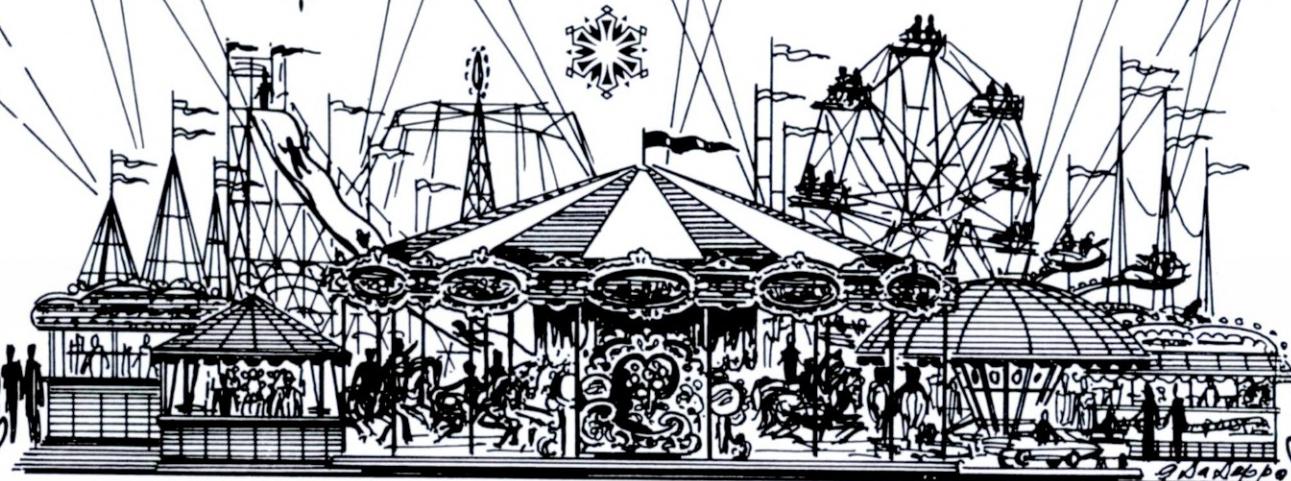
Santa's Christmas
CIRCUS



WISHES
YOU AND YOURS

Happy Holidays!

JIM ELLIOTT
GENERAL MANAGER



Time is a jumble of shifting parts, or at best a tangled string. Nothing flows straight, chronologically sure, from my memory bank. One of the mysteries of research is how the searcher can completely miss a large amount of pertinent information directly under his nose. This report corrects such an oversight.

1853

The circus appeared on the frontier as quickly as settlements could provide an audience. The earliest towns of Kansas clung to the banks of the Missouri River and it was to the river towns that the circus first appeared, coming up-stream on steamboats.

Herr Driesbach & Company's Menagerie combined with Mabie & Company's United States Circus under the management of P.A. Older ventured up the Missouri as far as St. Joseph, Missouri, which the show played on Friday, August 5, 1853.

An advertisement in the St. Joseph *Gazette*, August 3, listed exhibitions at the following Missouri towns: August 1, Barry; August 2, Platte City; August 3, Weston; August 4, DeKalb; August 5, St. Joseph; August 6, Savanna.

1856

Orton's Badger Circus billed two Missouri towns in 1856--Westport, April 25 and Kansas City the 26th. The Kansas City *Enterprise* believed that, "Everybody, and his wife should be on hand, to witness the performance of the horse-opera." If Orton played any Kansas towns, it was a well-kept secret.

1859

Spalding & Rogers, traveling on the steamer James Raymond, billed Leavenworth for exhibitions July 15 and 16, 1859. No other Kansas dates are known. The Leavenworth *Daily Times* made no reference to the show following the exhibitions. There is no confirmation for the Leavenworth stand, and all we have is the following advertisement which appeared in the *Times* on July 15: "Spalding & Rogers' EUROPEAN CIRCUS. Comprising the elite of the European Circuses, Hippodromes and Gymnasia, selected at enormous expense, by a special Agent across the Atlantic the past season, expressly for Spalding & Rogers' New Orleans Amphitheatre, and their first tour in the United States, vis: FROM FRANCE, Mlle Elode Loyale, Mons. Francois, Mons. Guliaume, Mons. Loyale Mons. Cane. FROM GERMANY, Les Freres Conrad, Herr W. Conrad, Herr C. Conrad, Herr Von Paul.

ONLY BIG SHOW COMING

SUPPLEMENT

Vol. 1, Chapter 1, Part 1

By Orrin Copple King

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FROM ENGLAND, Mr. E. W. Wolcott, Mr. F. Donaldson, Mr. W. B. Cavanagh, Mr. W. Walters. FROM SPAIN, Senor Sarcedas, Senor Carlos, Senor Cordella. FROM AMERICA, Mr. R. Omar, Mr. Geo. Sargent, Mr. W. H. Hill, Master Berry. Will give recherche entertainments, embracing the gems--of the--Gymnase Normal de Moros, Madrid, Gymnasium Von Edelmann, Berlin, Hippodromes of France, Sports of Old England, Turner Vereins of Germany, Gymnase of Trist, Paris Curriculum of Ancient Rome.

Herald used by Spalding & Rogers in 1859. Pfening Archives.

"AT 1 AND 7 P. M., At Leavenworth City, Friday and Saturday, July 15 and 16, Under an Elegant Pavilion of Variegated Colors! blending the flags of the Kingdoms to which these foreign artists owe allegiance, and with a new arrangement of seats, after the style used in Europe. ADMISSION 50 cents. Children and servants 25 cents. Also, in adjoining Tents, the MUSEUM OF LIVING WONDERS! A huge living African BOA CONSTRCTOR, 33 feet long weighing 251 Pounds. An enormous live African ANACONDA, 15 feet long, weighing 67 lbs., and the famous LIVING SKELETON VIOLINIST! ALEX MONTARO, weighing 54 lbs., and 26 years old, and Spalding & Rogers newly organized Campbell Minstrels, Comprising the cream of Christy's, Matt. Peels, Newcomb Rumsey's, and other popular Minstrels. Admission, each 25 cents.

"It is reasonable, that with the performers and horses, always refreshed and rested (Spalding & Rogers steamer James Raymond being detailed ex-

pressly for the transportation of the company to the river towns,) something different may be expected from ordinary Circuses, with the performers and horses jaded by traveling all night over all sorts of roads, in all sorts of weather, and especially from the natural conjunction of starved menageries and dilapidated circuses just now in vogue.

"Managing Proprietor, G. R. Spalding; Interpreter, Mons. Vallee; Treasurer, W. H. Wells; French Clown, Mons. Loyale; German Clown, Herr Von Paul; Equestrian Director, Geo. Sargent; Maitre de Cirque. R. W. Wolcott."

1864

During the Civil War circus activity in Kansas came to a near halt. Missouri was held to the Union by slender threads, and it is a little known fact that Missouri ranked third in the number of battles fought, surpassed only by Virginia and Tennessee. The Missouri River offered the easiest route to Kansas, but the river traverses the entire width of the state and all traffic risked the hazards of brawling armies and piratical bushwhackers. Two circuses late in the war took a chance on Kansas.



Jas. Melville's Australian Circus entertained Leavenworth for three days, beginning Monday, July 4, 1864. A one-column ad appeared in both Leavenworth newspapers on June 21, twelve insertions in the *Daily Times* and thirteen in the *Daily Conservative*. Heading the list of advertised performers was James Melville, "The Australian Horseman, in his grand Bareback and Hurdle Sensation Acts."

Others named were Mlle. Jeanette Ellsler, "The Greatest Tight Rope Danseuse;" Mme. Louise, "The Accomplished Equestrienne;" The Australian Family, "The elegant Equilibrist and Posturers, in their Graceful Tableaux and Classic Groupings;" Nat Austin, "The popular Humorist, Clown and Versatile Performer;" The Conrad Brothers, "The Unrivaled Gymnasts;" Albert Avma, "The famed Scenic, Two and Four Horse Rider." Carlos Parker, "The Fa-

vorite Clown and Extraordinary Contortionist."

Lesser artists named in the ad and grouped together in a catch-all section without indicating their specialties were "Messrs. Walters, Johannsen, Gilbert, Zartier, Graff, Kanisoa, Helmbold and Fredericks. Masters Eddie, Charles, Willie and Frank.

"Prof. Kopp's New York Brass Band Will pass through the Principal Streets, mounted on richly caparisoned steeds, discoursing Beautiful Music.

"The Profusion of Attractions will be presented with all the fascinating adjuncts essential to render them imitable in superiority and marvelous splendor.

"For details, see Mammoth Pictorials, Illustrated Descriptive Sheets and Programmes, Display Bills, and other Advertisements.

"F. A. Keeler, Manager; R. S. Dingess, Agent."

Three performances were scheduled for the 4th of July, the first at 10 a. m. Two shows were given on each of the other two days at "2 and 7 1/2 P. M."

Admission was 50 cents. Reserved seats 75 cents, and "Children to Reserved Seats 50 cts." The ad closed with the promise of, "SEATS FOR ALL."

Neither the *Times* nor the *Conservative* had any comment on the show's crowds or quality.

The weather left much to be desired. "The clouds came down in chunks last evening, literally," according to the *Conservative* of July 6, "drenching the steeples and drowning the cocks" as King Lear has it. Such another deluge has not visited this section during the present year. Three Mile Creek rose upward of ten feet in course of half an hour. The storm was accompanied with hail at first but no damage resulted."

The *Times* reported that, "The cellar of the saloon opposite Rose's book store filled with water."

On the 6th of July the thermometer reached 105.

Melville played Atchison on, June 30, without arousing any comment before playing Weston, Missouri, July 1, and Kansas City on the 2nd.

Mabie's Grand Menagerie and Moral Exhibition billed Oskaloosa for Tuesday, September 6, 1864. The only press announcement of the coming was a handout run in the *Independent*, September 3. "Mabie's Menagerie.

"This institution is to be in this place for exhibitions next Tuesday, the 6th inst. It is said to be one of the best animal shows in America. All persons--children learning natural history es-

day Valley Falls); September 6, Oskaloosa; September 7, Topeka; September 8, Clinton; September 9, Baldwin City; September 12 and 13, Leavenworth; September 14, Atchison.

The advertisement began, "MABIE'S GRAND MENAGERIE and Moral Exhibition!

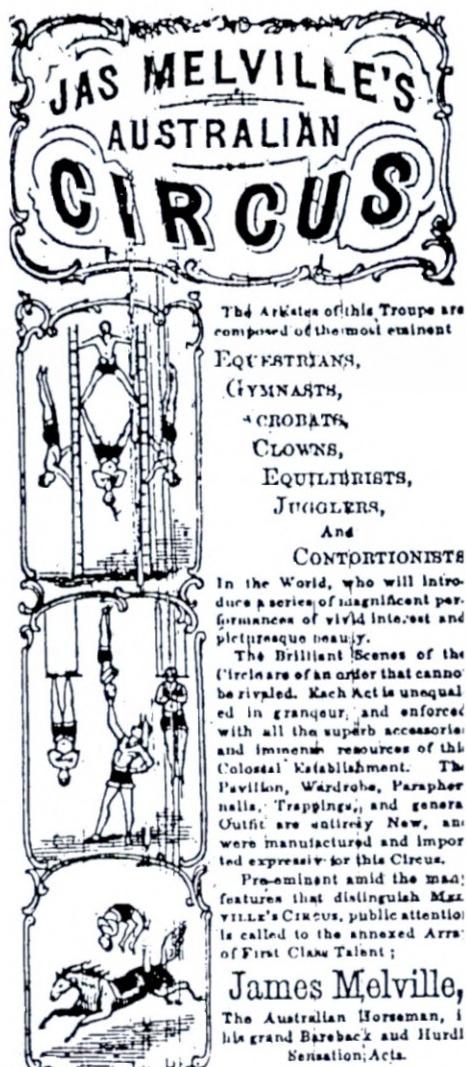
"Of the Marvels and Splendors of Animated Nature, organized for the season of 1864 is the most extensive complete and magnificent establishment of the kind extant. Language is inadequate to perfectly describe the LIVING WONDERS.

"Congregated in this Matchless Cabinet of Zoology, All parts of the World have contributed to this SUPERB COLLECTION! And its completeness leaves nothing to be desired by the most exacting critic. It is conceded that a more brilliant display of WILD ANIMALS and Rare Birds!

"Is seldom, if ever, presented to the admirers of Natural History. The wealth and energy of the proprietor, combined with his unerring appreciation of public taste, have enabled him to offer to the public the most complete Menagerie in the world.

"The following list, taken in Chicago, April 15th, 1864, embraces some of the ZOOLOGICAL AND ORNITHOLOGICAL SPECIMENS; And is deemed to be the correct catalogue now on Exhibition: Asiatic and African Elephants, Otters from the Sandwich Islands, Arabian Camels, Nebraska Buffalo, Cape Good Hope Lion & Lioness, Siberian White Coons, Amazonian Black Tiger, Civet and Musk Cats, Senegal Leopards, Porcupine, Hedgehog, Opossums, Royal Brazilion Tiger, Asiatic Jackals, Syrian Goats, Panther of Paraguay, Madagascar Rabbits, Striped and Spotted Hyenas, African Pelicans, California Grizzly Bears, Spanish Macaws, Black Bear of Hudson Bay, Wheedah Birds, Love Birds, Cinnamon Bear of Oregon, African Crowned Cranes, Ichneumons and Ant Eaters, Golden and Silver Pheasants, Numidian Lion and Lioness, Chinese and English Pheasants, Lioness and Whelps, King Lori Birds, Zebra of Zahara, Albino Guinea Hens, Apes, Monkeys and Baboons, White & Grey Tropical Cockatoos, New Holland Kangaroos, Paradise Birds, Peruvian Lama, South American Parrots and Santa Fe Bison, Paroquets. Also a great variety of Australian Birds of gorgeous plumage. Attached to this Grand Exposition are The only ARABIAN CAMELS in America!"

The circus aspect of the "Moral Exhibition" was featured in the advertisements and handouts. The circus



Part of the Melville ad that appeared in the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* on June 28, 1864. Kansas State Historical Society.

pecially--should see the animals of other countries if possible, and a good menagerie gives an excellent opportunity for this purpose to the young--and to the old who have not seen one--and this opportunity should be made available on this occasion. Of course, if children go, the parents will go to take care of the youngsters. The admission is 50 cents each for those over 10 years of age; under 10 years 25 cents each. The exhibition will open about 2 o'clock."

The *Independent* carried no advertisement and after the show had come and gone made no comments concerning it.

Business Agent F. L. Coulcock placed the same attractive two-column ad in the papers of Lawrence, Leavenworth and Atchison which listed the scheduled towns: September 3, Troy; September 5, Grasshopper Falls (Present

portion was described as follows: "PROFESSOR SEARS, The famous 'LION KING,' will enter the DENS OF PERFORMING Lions, Leopards, Tigers, Panthers & Cougars!"

"The Educated ELEPHANT, 'Romeo,' is a miracle of sagacity, and has been taught by Mr. STEWARD (sic) CRAVEN to perform a variety of astonishing feats, such as Posturing, Balancing, Dancing, Grouping on Pedestals, and to actually stand on his Head!"

"The Laughter-provoking Antics of the Performing Kangaroos! Trained Ponies and Monkeys! and the Comical Mules! Will enliven the more thrilling scenes of the entertainment."

The parade was promised to be "a Grand Moving Panorama, over a mile in length, which will pass through the principal streets, affording the public a gratuitous view of the splendid Caravans, Horses, Trappings, Paraphernalia, &c. The BAND CHARIOT, drawn by A TEAM OF ELEPHANTS AND CAMELS Will lead the imposing Procession, the whole forming a spectacle unsurpassed even by the grandeur and magnificence of Oriental Cavalcades."

On the morning of September 13, the Leavenworth *Daily Times* made the only comment on the aggregation. "The Mabie's Menagerie duly arrived and paraded the streets yesterday morning, and exhibited in the afternoon and evening. It was largely attended, and we believe, gave general satisfaction. They give another and final exhibition this afternoon and evening."

Side by side with Mabie's ad in the *Kansas State Journal*, Lawrence, September 1, was a brief report that should explain the dearth of circuses in Kansas during the Civil War.

"Information has been received that there is a force of 1,000 bushwhackers near Harrisonville, Cass county, Mo., intent on a raid into Kansas. This information, together with other facts that had been collected, caused some alarm here on Monday [June 28] and Tuesday, and measures were taken effectually to protect us."

Lawrence well remembered Quantrill's raid of 1863 when the guerillas burned and looted the town and murdered 150 of its citizens.

On the 3d of July, 30 bushwhackers were driven from the vicinity of Platte City, Missouri, about ten miles from Leavenworth. Five guerillas were killed and eight horses captured by Union forces.

Melville and Mabie were lucky.

1865

With the coming of peace in the spring of 1865, Kansas was once more attractive to traveling showmen. Among the first was Geo. W. DeHaven & Company's United Circus which billed Leavenworth for June 21 and 22.

J. H. Owen, DeHaven's agent, was in Leavenworth June 14, and placed an ad in the *Daily Conservative* which ran for seven consecutive days. "Mr. Owen, the well known agent of DeHaven's--formerly North's--circus, took us by surprise yesterday," the *Conservative* reported, June 15. "They are to be here on the 21st. That is a circus."

The ad proclaimed: "Geo. W. DeHaven & Co's UNITED CIRCUS. Newly organized for the season of 1865, with a TROUPE OF STAR PERFORMERS Unequalled by any Company Traveling.

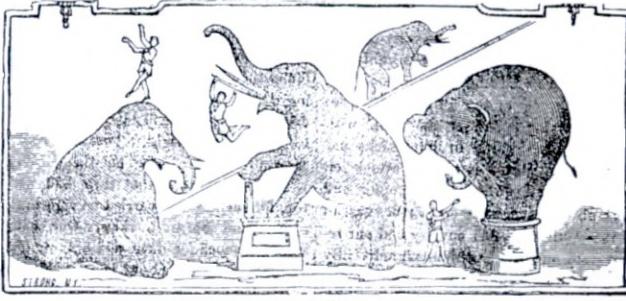
"GEO. W. DeHAVEN, MANAGER; Levi J. North, Equestrian Director; A. Haigh, Treasurer; J. H. Perkins, Leader of Brass Band; A. T. Britton, Leader of String Band; P. H. Seamon, 1st

Portion of a newspaper advertisement used by Mabie. Circus World Museum collection.

Clown; W. McArthur, 2d Clown.

"Turn out, and all come and see the wonderful and astonishing feats of MR. W. NAYLOR. [Cut of rider doing head-stand on horse back.] The World Renowned Somerset Rider, and the FREE EXHIBITION, immediately before opening the doors of the afternoon performance, M'LLE. LOUISE, The greatest Tight Rope performer in the world, will make an Ascension on a single wire, three hundred feet in length from the ground to the top of the Center Pole, fifty feet high from the ground. Remember this performance takes place about 1 o'clock in the afternoon, and is free for all. This great Combination Company embraces more talent than any other company now traveling, among which are the following: M'LLE LOUISE, The greatest Ascensionist and Tight Rope Performer in the world. M'LLE DE'AULEY, The great Parisian Equestrienne. Madame Annette Seamon, The Wire Sylphide and Danseuse. LEVI J. NORTH, America's own Horseman. SIGNOR BLISS, The wonder of the world, in his extraordinary Antipodal Feat of walking a ceiling. MR. ALBERT AYMAR, In his celebrated Principal act, The Gymnastic Brothers, From Cirque Imperial, Paris, Trained ponies, Yankee Notions and Little Rebel, The smallest creatures ever introduced in a ring. MR. CHARLES RIVERS, In Beautiful Changeable Acts. BERDEAU and CARB, From Cook's Royal Circus, in their wonderful performance on the Horizontal Bar. Young LEVI NORTH, The greatest rider of his age living, in his thrilling act on his wild Ponies. HENRY COYLE, The celebrated Trick Clown in his celebrated Act on stilts. MR. W. NAYLOR, In his wonderful Battoute Leaps. The Trained Horse, MARS, Introduced by Levi J. North. Signor Bliss and Children, In their beautiful acts of posturing, BAT-TOUTE LEAPS and TUMBLING, By the Troupe, led by the Hero of 100 Somersets, the performance will be enlivened by that jolly son of Momus MR. P. H. SEAMON, The great American Clown, Jester and comic Vocalist. MR. W. MC'ARTHUR, The world-renowned Funny Clown, Also the comic Mules THAD and JOSH, who never fail to bring forth from

**M A B I E ' S
GRAND
MENAGERIE!**



A N D

MORAL EXHIBITION,

Of the marvels and splendors of Animated Nature, organized for the season of 1863, is the most extensive, complete and magnificent establishment of the kind extant. Language is inadequate to perfectly describe.

THE LIVING WONDERS

Congregated in this matchless Cabinet of Zoology.
All parts of the world have contributed to this superb collection, and its completeness leaves nothing to be desired by the most exacting critic. It is conceded that a more brilliant display of

WILD ANIMALS & RARE BIRDS

the audience rounds of applause. Each entertainment will conclude with a Laughable Ballet Pantomime, in which M^{lle}s Julia, Fanny, Jeannette, Marie and Masters John, Frank, James, Thaddeus, Joshua and Duffield, will appear. Each performance will be enlivened by music given by the unrivalled New York Silver Cornet OPERA BAND, Led by that famous champion, J. H. Perkins. Admission 75 cents, Children 50 cents. Doors open 1 1/2 and 7 P. M. Performance to commence at 2 and 7 1/2 P. M. Remember that THE GRAND OUTSIDE ASCENSION takes place at 1 o'clock P.M., free to all. For full particulars see large Bills and Programmes. J. M. OWEN, AGENT. P. S. Two performances each day, rain or shine."

Moving up-stream on the Missouri River DeHaven & Company arrived at Leavenworth at eleven o'clock on June 21, aboard the steamboat *Gen. Porter*.

Following the performances of the 21st, the *Conservative* reported, "THE CIRCUS.--DeHaven & Co's circus is the best that has ever visited the Missouri valley. Levi J. North, the Lieutenant General of the circus men, who was an old hand at the business fifty years ago, and doesn't look any older now than he did then, is with it, accompanied by his son of about ten years, who surpasses in nerve and activity anything we have ever seen of his age and size. The horses are all good, the riding good. It is alone worth the price of admission to see the hurdle rider, a performer rarely

equaled in agility and precision. The tumbling is of the best and most difficult character. The acrobats are all fine looking, well-developed men, and there is not an inferior performer among them.

"The seats were filled with some of our best citizens yesterday, and all seemed highly pleased. Those who do not attend the circus will miss a first-class performance. The audience filled the canvass to overflowing last night, and as everybody brings away a good report, all would believe those who desire a seat to go early this afternoon and evening. This is their last day here.

"Another item of interest is the hair-

less mare, in the side show. She is no humbug. Go and see her."

Young Levi North on the first day of the engagement suffered an accident which prompted an accolade from the editor of the *Conservative*. "Accident-Master North, the little prodigy rider and tumbler--who, by the way, is about as big as an old Dominion coffee pot--while riding two horses yesterday, fell with one of them and had his forehead badly cut by shoe caulk. The blood ran down all over the little fellow's face, but he wouldn't give up his ride, and accordingly remounted. He stood up straight and brave, waving his hat with one hand and plying the whip with the other, amidst the deafening applause of the audience. The horses then bolted the track, but the daring little rider sprang from their backs to a tent pole and then slid to the ground.

"He has got more nerve than you can shake a stick at, and will make a regular Levi."

The Atchison *Daily Champion*, June 20, reported that, "The enterprising agent of DeHaven's Circus, Mr. Owen, put up a fence eighty feet long and twelve feet high on the corner of Commercial and Second Streets, and plastered it over from top to bottom with their fine display bills."

DeHaven's ad in the *Champion* ran for seven days beginning June 17.

Circus day was "a piping hot" time. There was very little air stirring and the sun was blazing hot."

Despite the extremely hot weather, the *Champion* was able to report that, "Our merchants did a thriving business yesterday. The city was crowded with vehicles of every description, and the crowd of people was immense.

"DeHaven's Circus, which exhibited here yesterday, was the best performance of that character we have ever seen in the Western country. We understand that it will be back here in a few weeks. It goes up as far as Council Bluffs and returns."

On the way up the river the show played St. Joseph, Missouri, June 26 and 27.

"Any lack of our usual quantity of reading matter in this morning's paper," the *Champion* apologized, "must be attributed to the fact that our

compositors all went to the Circus yesterday, as did nearly everybody in town and country."

On July 1 the Leavenworth *Daily Conservative* had the pleasure of announcing, "Coming Again--That long-to-be remembered circus of DeHaven's will pay us another visit on its way down river next Tuesday, the 11th of July. They will have a crowded canvas."

The advertisement in the *Conservative* which ran for eight days was the same as used previously, except for the addition of the name of George Reid, "Adv's Agt," and a cut showing the human fly walking on the ceiling.

On the 12th the *Conservative* ran the following: "The Mammoth Circus of De Haven & Co., arrived at our levee on their return, on time, yesterday morning, and made a triumphant march through our city to their former place of exhibition. Both the performances in the afternoon and evening were well attended. By urgent request, and to accommodate a large number of soldiers, the circus will give three performances at the Fort to-day--at 9 1/2 a. m., 1 1/2 p. m., and 7 1/2 p. m. We advise all the boys in blue to attend, for it is the best circus ever in this part of the country. To-day at the Fort will positively be the last of their entertainment here."

The three exhibitions on the 12th were not exactly a blessing to DeHaven, as the *Conservative* reported July 14. "An Amateur.--On Wednesday DeHaven & Co.'s circus pitched their tent up near the Fort for three performances. M^{lle} Louise appeared as usual and walked the wire. As she got down after her feat there was no applause, which elicited the remark from her that 'the soldiers do not know enough to applaud,' or words to that effect. At this the Drum Major of the 14th Illinois regiment stepped up and said he could do better than that himself. The showman in attendance upon M^{lle} Louise offered to bet him \$25 he could not walk ten feet on the wire. The bold sojourner (sic) remarked, 'You are the man I have been looking for six months,' and pulling off his boots mounted the wire in his stocking feet. The showman then told him if he performed the feat his whole regiment would be admitted to the circus free. The gallant Major walked up to the center pole, and without touching it, executed 'about-face' *a la militaire*, and started on the return. When about midway he stood on one foot, sticking the other out straight, and then sat down on the wire with both legs extended. He arrived at the bottom safe-



tended. He arrived at the bottom safely, and amid loud cheers from his assembled comrades. The showmen were rather 'taken down,' and doubtless came to the conclusion that it was not safe to throw out wagers indiscriminately to a lot of soldiers, for all kinds of chaps have been out to fight for the Union. In the evening the Major came down with a large number of his comrades and asked the fulfillment of the bet by free admission, but was refused. The boys got mad and threatened violence. Quite a row occurred, in which three of four persons were knocked down and the tent cut in several places. The treasurer's box was also upset, and the loose change and all the tickets gobbled. The boys were finally let in, but a very destructive *melee* came near resulting from the matter. Nobody was badly hurt. We know nothing of the truth further than as stated above and consequently cannot attach any blame to either side. We presume, however, the circus men were a little miffed at the 'amateur' performance, and the soldier boys felt rather good, in which case a row was not difficult to inaugurate.

"Levi J. North with his boy and trick horse seceded from DeHaven's circus at Council Bluffs. People here wondered what had become of the old showman and his sprightly boy." The *Conservative* had no explanation.

Moving down-river DeHaven promised exhibitions at several Missouri towns, including: July 12, Kansas City; July 14, Booneville; July 13, Lexington; July 15, Jefferson City. Considering that DeHaven played Leavenworth July 12, it may be that his proposed route was rescheduled.

Atchison nearly lost the visit promised by DeHaven for July 10. The *Daily Champion* carried the story. "De Haven & Co's Circus failed to reach here in time to give an afternoon exhibition. They performed at night, however. We understand that the reason of the failure in the afternoon was that the boat on which they were traveling got aground on a sand-bar between this city and St. Joseph."

For ten days the Atchison *Daily Champion* carried an ad heralding the coming exhibitions of July 20, by the Orton family. The entire advertisement is quoted: "Orton & Brothers' Great C I R C U S! Enlarged and Greatly Improved for the year 1865 with an Entire New Outfit. Brilliant Trappings on an Unequaled Company of Performers & Beautiful Horses, will perform at Atchison, July 20, 1865.

"A Grand Mid-day Performance, commencing at 2 o'clock, and in the

evening at 7 o'clock. Observe the Star Talent. Six Lady Equestriennes, MRS. MILES ORTON, MRS. H. ORTON, MISSES IRENE, JULIA, CELESTE and LITTLE JESSIE; MR. MILES ORTON, MR. DAN ORTON, MR. LESTER, MR. ANDREW GAFFNEY, MONS. PAUL, JAMES MARKS, JAMMIE ROBINSON, MASTER R. Z. YOUNG LEON, and the people's favorite, DR. JAMES A. GILKISON and BILLY ANDREWS.

"In addition to the Grand Equestrian Divertissements and games or Curriculum, will be given a Brilliant Pantomime, entitled the World of MAGIC, or HORSE ON THE BRAIN.

"Admission 50 Cents. Children under ten, 25 Cents.

"The entire performance will be accompanied with a splendid Brass Band, led by Mr. Philip Manuel."

All that is known of the engagement appeared in the *Champion* July 21. "We had another rain last night and our streets are muddy again.

"Orton & Bros. Circus was to have exhibited here yesterday afternoon, but it didn't. A very small attendance."

Two days later, July 22, Yankee Robinson played the town.

The day before Orton & Brothers performed in Atchison the *Daily Champion* ran an ad extolling the wonders of Yankee Robinson's show. "Everybody says YANKEE ROBINSON'S Great Consolidations. For the Gigantic Campaign of 1865, out flanks all competitors. OVER \$100,000 INVESTMENT, P. A. Older, Manager; Erin Perry, Equestrian Director; G. McDonald, Leader; Geo. S. Cole, Treasurer; F. L. Coulcock, Agent."

In the season of 1864, Coulcock had been the agent for the Mabie show.

Fayette Lodawick
"Yankee" Robinson.
Pfening Archives.

The ad continued with a horizontal illustration printed vertically depicting the parade led by the famous 40-horse hitch pulling an elaborately decorated band wagon.

"Yankee Robinson has associated himself with the Proprietors of EIGHT EXHIBITIONS, together with his, making NINE SHOWS. Observe the Immense Congress of Exhibitions! YAN-

KEE ROBINSON'S BIG SHOW Re-Organized, Enlarged and greatly improved for the 21st Annual Campaign. The Great NEW YORK CIRCUS! Purchased of James Melville & Co. The largest and decidedly the most magnificent and costliest Establishment in America containing over Forty Ring Horses, Ponies, Mules, &c., &c., and six Lady Equestriennes."

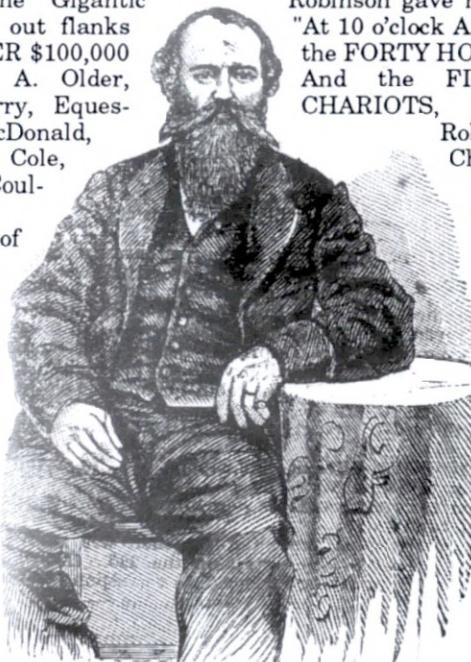
Other features included "The Silver Mountain Equestrian Bears, "In their wonderful and pleasing acts, dressed in unique Costumes, male and female, a la 'Yankee Boy' and 'Yankee Gal,' Mock Marriage Ceremony, Dancing, Acrobatic, Gymnastic, Posturing Equilibrists, Racing, Soldier Drilling, Driving in Harness, Stump Speaking, &c., &c., more than astonishing every beholder. N. B. They are taken from their cages and brought into the Circus Ring where their performances can be viewed by every visitor and with perfect security."

Other features were O'Reilley's Untamable Bison from the Himalaya Mountains; Mons. Clarrie's Monkeys, Ponies, Dogs and Goats; Showles' Highly Trained Animals; the Snow Brothers Great Gladiatorium; and a Double Troupe of COMIC MULES! which "Out-Mule all the Mules in any show or circus. Entirely new tricks and Performances."

According to the advertisement, Robinson gave no ordinary parade. "At 10 o'clock A. M., make room for the FORTY HORSE BAND TEAM! And the FIVE SPLLENDED CHARIOTS, including Yankee Robinson's Private Chariot, drawn by four Arabian steeds, magnificently caparisoned. The finest establishment in the U. S.--cost near \$8,000, and the Oriental Pagoda Chariot drawn by six beautiful ponies. Also the real TOM THUMB Cortège, drawn by beautifully spotted diminutive Ponies, Dogs and Goats, containing the

smallest man living, Gen. Grant, Jr., so long and favorably known at Barnum's Museum. 15 years old, weighs 18 pounds, and only 26 inches high."

Along the side of the advertisement was a string of nine illustrations and



at the bottom an engraving of boxing mules.

"Price of Admission, 75 cents. Children under 12 years 50 cents."

Listed at the bottom of the ad was the scheduled route: July 20 & 21, St. Joseph, Missouri; July 24; Weston, Missouri; July 25 & 26, Leavenworth.

The Atchison *Champion* described the weather on show day as "delightful."

"Our streets yesterday were crowded with wagons of every description, and a very large number of people were in the city. In addition to those always in town Saturday purchasing their supplies of goods for the week, we had the attraction of the circus, which drew large crowds."

The Leavenworth papers paid scant attention to the Robinson show prior to the engagement and none at all after the exhibitions.

The Oskaloosa *Independent* speaking of the exhibitions of July 27, reported that, "The show came and went. It is said not to have been the best thing in the world--Some say it was a poor affair. We think such 'institutions' generally are worthless or worse."

The editor obviously disliked traveling shows, but he wished them no harm, and was shocked by a malicious act against the show. "We hear it said that some one cut the harness of a part of the show outfit on Saturday night. We can hardly believe anyone in our community is so degraded as to do that kind of work. It is as bad as stealing sheep."

"Palmer's Great Western Circus," according to the Atchison *Daily Champion* of August 22, 1865, "arrived here day before yesterday [August 20] unheralded by previous announcement. Their original destination was from St. Joseph through Northern Missouri and Iowa, and their advertising agent went that route, with their bills and notices. The Company attempted to follow, but were unable to proceed, on account of the heavy rains and bad roads. They therefore turned back, and after exhibiting a week in St. Joseph, came here. The St. Joseph papers speak in the highest terms of the troupe, and their performance is recommended as surpassing any other Company that has visited the West this season. They gave an exhibition in this city last evening, and will give a performance both afternoon and evening to-day. Admission 75 cents, children 50 cents."

The only newspaper ad appeared on the 22nd: "PALMER'S Great Western

Circus from New York and Philadelphia. [Cut of girl dancing on horseback.] Will Exhibit in Atchison This (Tuesday) Afternoon and Evening, Aug. 22. Admission 75 Cents.--Children under 10 years, 50 Cents H. PALMER, Manager; M. L. COX, Treasurer; HARRY WHITBY, Equestrian Director.

"The fame of this unrivaled Troupe is world-renowned. It has met with universal commendation. In the physical science of Acrobatic, Gymnastic, and EQUESTRIAN Exercises, Sports and Pastimes. The Troupe is composed of the following named Skillful Artistes, M'LLE ELVIRA WHITBY, The daring young American Equestrienne and bare back rider, whose unrivaled performances have thrilled the world, has no equal in her extremely splendid and

A portion of a newspaper ad used by Palmer in 1865. Pfening Archives.



PALMER'S GREAT WESTERN CIRCUS,

(From New York and Philadelphia.)

H. PALMER, - - Manager.
T. J. THAYER, - - Treasurer.
HARRY WHITBY, Eques. Director.

AT JERSEYVILLE,

MUNDAY, JUNE 12.

Afternoon at 2 and Evening at 7 o'clock.

The fame of this unrivaled Troupe is world-renowned. It has met with universal commendation. In the physical science of Acrobatic, Gymnastic and Equestrian exercises, sports and pastimes, each of the performers possesses the most consummate skill, pleasing, graceful daring--never failing to delight the spectator, transferring him or her for the time being, to the very realms of ecstasy or fascination.

GRAND PROCESSION!

With a band of music, will be made at 10 o'clock A. M. on the day of opening, consisting of the splendid Chariot "Sea Shell," drawn by forty superb gray horses.

The Troupe is composed of the following named skillful Artistes:

M'LLE. ELVIRA WHITBY,

The daring young American Equestrienne and bare back Rider, whose unrivaled performances have thrilled the world, has no equal in her extremely splendid and truly classical manage exercises, in which she has elicited the applause of the best critics in America as well as in Europe.

LA PETITE ROSA,

classical Manage Exercises in which she has elicited the applause of the best critics in the world.

"LA PETITE ROSA, The Child Equestrian--graceful and charming--will appear in single and double acts of Equestrianism, in which she will thrill the audience in the developments of the skill she has so proudly attained in the profession. M'LLE LA VINIA, a scenic Equestrienne and fascinating Danseuse, will take a prominent part in the Panorama of Living Artistes, and thus add a lovely picture to enrapture the spell-bound spectator. WM. KENNEDY, The People's Clown, will appear and make the moments pass pleasantly, convulsing the audience with the exhibition of his wit, merriment and humor. G. WOMSBOLD, as the man of Many Forms, will astound the audience with his power of building himself into all inconceivable shapes. He is truly wonderful, and has no equal in the world.

"MONS. ROCHELLE, Unquestionably, as the most profound critics say, 'The best Gymnast in the World.' L. ZANFRETTA, a wonderful Acrobat and Gymnast, will perform the difficult feat known as the Flying Trapeze. In this he will astonish all beholders. W. WHITBY, the fearless bare-back and Principal Rider. W. H. GREEN, The great Horse Tamer, Modern Hercules, and Six Horse Rider will appear. W. MORGAN, The Bar 'ct (sic) and Hurdle Rider. WM. SMITH, In his graceful divertissement, known as La Perche, will exhibit his wonderful powers and skill. He is also au fait in his celebrated character of Man-Monkey. J. C. CLARK, Will indulge in his fearless and daring performances on the rope.

"THE HORSES, Are all thoroughbred, and wonderfully well trained. The beautiful Pony, SPIDER, the pet of the children, is the smallest equine animal in the world. The Trick Horse, GREY EAGLE, and that beautifully spotted charger CHAMPION, and The Comically Educated Mules 'Tom' and 'Jerry,' from Acapulco, Mexico, Will be exhibited, and made to demonstrate their wondrous powers during the exhibition."

After the show had left town the *Champion* expressed the opinion that, "Palmer's Great Western Circus, which exhibited here on Monday evening and Tuesday afternoon and evening, is the best performance of the kind that has visited us this season. It was well patronized."

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video Inc. Topeka, Kansas

**Merry Christmas &
A Happy New Year!**



Kenneth Feld presents
**SIEGFRIED & ROY®
AT THE MIRAGE**

LAS VEGAS



*Mike Martin,
Circus Hobby Hall
and
Center Ring Videos*

*Wish Everyone
The Happiest Of
Holiday Seasons!*

Last Minute Stocking Stuffers

BUFFALO & PAWNEE BILL KEY CHAINS

Here's an unusual item! An exacting copy of an early 1900's watch fob medallion. Shows detailed likenesses of the two Bills in bronze-like metal. Nice nostalgic piece.

EACH \$7.50 Postpaid

"1ST DAY ISSUE" - CIRCUS STAMP ENVELOPES

Celebrating 200 years of American Circus, these gorgeous colorful envelopes are available in two styles - each with the new circus stamps and the official Washington DC. cancellation.

- * Special R/B Large Envelope w/4 Stamps - \$3.00 Postpaid
- * Special R/B Small Envelope w/1 Stamp - \$1.50 Postpaid

LIMITED QUANTITIES AVAILABLE!



CIRCUS LICENSE PLATES

Pictured above - these ornate metal car tags feature the official club logo in bright colors of red, orange and blue on white.

EACH \$10.50 Postpaid

POST CARDS

"200 YEARS CIRCUS IN AMERICA" - Special commemorative card issued by the Milwaukee Post Office. Fancy, patriotic design. 3 FOR A \$1.00 Postpaid



R/B HONORARY RINGMASTER WHISTLES

Beautifully boxed metal whistles, emblazoned with color "GLOBE" logo on sides. Great display item!

EACH \$15.00 Postpaid

RBBGB SOUVENIR DECALS

1) OLD GLOBE STYLE - 1950's Personalize your stationary, books or binders with stick on decals.

5 for \$3.50 Postpaid

2) OLD FAVORITES - 1950's Lou Jacobs (Circus Stamp artwork), Menagerie Tiger & 3 Ring Spec.

1 OF EACH \$3.50 Postpaid

3) NEW LOGO CHARACTERS - 1968 Ring, Ling, Barnum and Bailey the four new characters designed under Feld ownership.

SIX DECALS \$ 3.50 Postpaid

RBBGB CIRCUS PATCHES

a) 126th Edition - "ARIANA" - features the full color poster artwork of the "Human Arrow" plus Tom & Tammy Parish \$3.50 Ea. Postpaid

b) 125th Edition - "GOLDEN GLOBE" celebrating 125 years of the Ringling/Barnum Circus

\$2.50 Each Postpaid

All orders in the Continental U.S. & Canada Postpaid. Europe & the rest of the world please add \$10.00 per order. Please allow 4 to 6 weeks for delivery.

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

Mike Martin

Dept. BW - 16840 S.W. 62 St.
Ft. Lauderdale, Fl 33331
Fla. residents add 6% Sales tax

KENNETH FELD PRESENTS

RINGLING BROS. & BARNUM & BAILEY

THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
SEARS

*Holiday
Greetings*

*From THE GREATEST SHOW
ON EARTH® and Everyone at
FELD ENTERTAINMENT, INC.*

© RINGLING BROS.